



ESSAYS ON  
LORD TENNYSON'S  
IDYLLS OF THE KING



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BY

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## PREFACE

THE extent of Tennyson's fame may be illustrated by the fact that these Essays on his Idylls were written as the basis of a course of lectures to an audience composed of undergraduates in an Indian college.

In issuing these notes for the use of English and American no less than Asiatic students of our great poet, a number of merely verbal and grammatical annotations have been omitted, and some alterations have been made to adapt the work for general use.

The object of this volume is to present a convenient summary of much information that is dispersed through too many books to be accessible at first hand in the case of the general reader.

The sources of the various Idylls have been very closely traced, yet in such a manner that the more earnest student will be tempted to carry his studies further. At the end of each study on the sources some notes on the text have been added.

The purpose of the frequent citations of parallel passages in these notes would be greatly misunderstood if it were thought that they implied any disbelief in the poet's originality in passages thus illustrated. Not the least of the many charms of Tennyson's poetry is the seeming combination of originality and allusiveness in a profusion of passages that mingle their own fresh music with dim unconscious echoes of poets dead and gone. To indicate such echoes, and not in any way to suggest that the late Laureate imitated his predecessors, has been the writer's object in noting so many parallelisms. If Tennyson's mind was saturated with ancient and modern literatures as it seemed to be, it was saturated even more deeply with the spirit of nature and of truth to nature. All poets thus minded must look over the limited field of human experience from somewhat similar points of view.

For their scholarly advice on many points the writer's best thanks are due to his friends Messrs. F. A. H. Elliot, C.I.E.; L. Ferrar; J. J. Heaton; and J. L. Jenkins, all of the Civil Service of India; and the Rev. J. M. Hamilton, S.J., of St. Xavier's College, Bombay. Especial thanks are also due to Mr. Bernard Quaritch for his kindness in permitting large extracts from the *Mabinogion* to be given.

The labour of writing these Essays was lightened by

the hopes that they might be dedicated to the writer's father, and that Lord Tennyson might be pleased to accept a copy of them. Neither of these hopes was destined to be realised. The little book can now only be offered as a lowly tribute of love and reverence on two graves.

H. L.



And still more explicitly in the *Epitaphium Damonis* :—

“Of Brutus, Dardan chief, my song shall be,  
 How with his barks he ploughed the British sea,  
 First from Rutupia’s towering headland seen,  
 And of his consort’s reign, fair Imogen ;  
 Of Brennus and Belinus, brothers bold,  
 And of Arviragus, and how of old,  
 Our hardy sires the Armorican controlled ;  
 And of the wife of Gorlois, who, surprised  
 By Uther, in her husband’s form disguised  
 (Such was the force of Merlin’s art), became  
 Pregnant with Arthur of heroic fame.  
 These themes I now revolve,—and oh, if Fate  
 Proportion to these themes my lengthened date,  
 Adieu, my shepherd’s reed ! yon pine-tree bough  
 Shall be thy future home ; there dangle thou  
 Forgotten and disused, unless ere long  
 Thou change thy Latin for a British song ;” etc.<sup>1</sup>

As Spenser may have suggested the theme to Milton, so possibly this latter passage may have suggested it to Dryden, if not also to Pope. It is perhaps not to be too deeply regretted that the fates reserved it for Tennyson.

Dryden gives an outline of his plan in the preface to his translation of Juvenal’s *Satires*, and Sir Walter Scott deplures that

“A ribald king and court  
 Bade him toil on to make them sport,”

and only left him leisure to compose a trashy opera on the story of Arthur.

<sup>1</sup> Cowper’s translation (Globe ed. Cowper’s Works, pp. 457, 462).

But too much weight need not be laid on Dryden's intended connection with the Arthurian poetry, as he seems to have thought more seriously of a different project. He says: "I was doubtful whether I should choose that of King Arthur conquering the Saxons, which, being farther distant in time, gives the greater scope to my invention; or that of Edward the Black Prince, in subduing Spain and restoring it to the lawful prince, though a great tyrant, Don Pedro the Cruel," etc. (*Essays of Dryden*, ed. C. D. Yonge, p. 26, Essay on Satire).

Sir Richard Blackmore, a physician and a voluminous writer of worthless couplets, seems to have "conveyed" part of Dryden's original scheme, and produced two huge epics, "Prince Arthur" and "King Arthur." Dryden complains in a mildly sarcastic way that Blackmore has only partly followed his model: "the guardian angels of kingdoms" (which Dryden had purposed to introduce) "were machines too ponderous for him to manage." However, Dryden will deal "the more civilly" with Sir Richard's Arthur, "because nothing ill should be spoken of the dead"; and certainly the knight-physician's poems were dead even before Queen Anne—never to "come again." But Sir Richard was a good man if a poor poet, and in that time of literary licentiousness his crime was dulness, not indecency.

Passing over Ireland's *Vortigern*, we come to Sir Walter Scott. It would be strange if Scott had not

frequently touched upon the Arthurian legends. His *Sir Tristrem* is an edition of the fragmentary romance by Thomas the Rymer, of Ereildoune; and the concluding "Fytte" has been *restored* by the hand of Scott himself, in the antique language and metre of the rest of the poem.

Again, in the Introduction to the first canto of *Marmion*, Sir Walter describes at some length the sway that the "legendary lay" holds over the poet's mind, and declares his resolve to

"Break a feeble lance  
In the fair fields of old romance";

of which resolve *Marmion* is the ample fulfilment.

In the *Bridal of Triermain* he relates a story of Arthur and a false damsel named Gwendolen.

One line, "Mordred with his look askance" (II. xiii.), reminds us of the Tennysonian Modred; and a few lines (II. iii.) describing the fair Gwendolen may be quoted:—

"Much force have mortal charms to stay  
Our peace in Virtue's toilsome way;  
But Gwendolen's might far outshine  
Each maid of merely mortal line.  
Her mother was of human birth,  
Her sire a Genie of the Earth,  
In days of old deem'd to preside  
O'er lovers' wiles and beauty's pride,  
By youths and virgins worshipp'd long  
With festive dance and choral song,



Till when the Cross to Britain came,  
 On heathen altars died the flame.  
 Now deep in Wastdale solitude  
 The downfall of his rights [rites?] he med.  
 And born of his resentment heir,  
 He trained to guile that lady fair,  
 To sink in slothful sin and shame  
 The champions of the Christian name."

Have we not in these lines a slight germ at least of the character that Tennyson has depicted in the lissome Vivien? Scott's conception of Arthur is not on a par with Tennyson's. Vivien attempts the blameless king in vain; but Scott's false damsel succeeds in fascinating her Arthur.

The various Waverley novels in which use is made of romantic materials need not be enumerated. Scott's mind was steeped in the spirit of mediæval chivalry, and he was the leader of the revival of romanticism at the beginning of this century.

Southey's *Maïloe in Wales* (1804) contains, as may be supposed, many references to the mythic heroes and the bards of Wales.

Wordsworth, after perusing Milton's *History of England*, versified in 1815 the romantic story of *Artegall and Elidure* "as a token of affectionate respect for the memory of Milton."<sup>1</sup> He refers to Geoffrey's *History* both in the lines quoted in chapter i. and in the following stanza:—

<sup>1</sup> See Knight's *Wordsworth*, vi. 17. This *Artegall* in the old chronicles was the prototype of Spenser's *Sir Arthegall*.

“There too we read of Spenser’s fairy themes,  
And those that Milton loved in youthful years ;  
The sage enchanter Merlin’s subtle schemes ;  
The feats of Arthur and his knightly peers ;  
Of Arthur—who, to upper light restored,  
    With that terrific sword  
Which yet he brandishes for future war,  
Shall lift his country’s fame above the polar star.”

In the *Egyptian Maid* he touches another Arthurian legend with great delicacy ; and in his poems referring to localities he makes various minor allusions to the Celtic traditions.

Matthew Arnold, in his *Tristram and Iseult*, retells with exquisite freshness and charm the story of Tristram’s death, briefly narrated by Scott in the archaic verses with which he completed the Rymer’s *Tristrem*. Arnold anticipates the Tennysonian character of Isolt of Brittany,

“Patient and prayerful, meek,  
Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to God,”

and closes the story with the tale of Vivien compassing Merlin’s destruction. He follows the “thorn-bush” form of the legend, and his story is simply told, as by the widowed Iseult to her and Tristram’s children.

Lastly, Mr. Morris and Mr. Swinburne have both given us remarkable poems, the former on Guinevere and other Arthurian themes, and the latter on Tristram ; but enough has been said to show what a harvest of

beautiful thoughts and words has sprung from the fruitful seed of

“Geoffrey’s book, and Malcore’s,”

Sir Edward Strachey claims for Malory’s romance the rank of *an epic*, a prose poem, epical in plan and treatment.

But we cannot now ascertain how far Malory was consciously *imaginative* in his work; he seems to us to have been largely so, no doubt, though Dr. Sommer’s labours have much reduced the old knight’s claim to originality; but it is not impossible that Malory’s standpoint was that of the quasi-historian at least as much as of the romance-writer. These legends had a concrete reality for him that they have not for us, and whenever he feels that he is too unreal, he shelters himself by saying that so it is written in the French book! Hence the *Morte Darthur* can hardly be regarded as an epical work in any strict sense of the term: Mr. Furnivall’s description of it as a “jumble” is at least as applicable.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the claim of Tennyson’s poem, as it now stands, to the title of epic, there cannot be much serious question—the only doubt being whether a poem

<sup>1</sup> Sir W. Scott, *Introd. to Sir Tristrem*, p. 81, says that Malory’s collection is “extracted at hazard, and without much art or combination, from the various French prose folios. . . . It is, however, a work of great interest, and curiously written in excellent English, and breathing a high tone of chivalry.” See, too, Sir G. Cox’s *Comp. Mythol.* p. 313; Sommer’s edition, *passim*; and the quotation from Mr. Gladstone below.

seemingly made up of a series of somewhat detached episodes may claim to possess the unity that must distinguish the true epic.

From the way in which the *Idylls* were given to the world, a few at a time, the last first and the first last, our earlier critics<sup>1</sup> were rather uncertain on this subject; but there is practically a consensus of recent opinion in favour of regarding the poem as an epical work in the fullest degree. M. Taine says that the poet is here "epic, antique, and ingenuous"; another critic, Mr. Roden Noel, calls the poem "this noble epic"; and a third, Mr. Stedman, hardly thinks "that the poet at first expected to compose an epic. It has grown insensibly. . . . It is the epic of chivalry—the Christian ideal of chivalry which we have deduced from a barbaric source."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Stedman seems to be in error when he says that the poet did not at first expect to compose an epic. Tennyson's early version of the *Morte Darthur* is entitled *The Epic*, and we may infer from the dialogue preceding these "old Homeric

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Gladstone excepted. See his *Quarterly Review* article, 1859, in his *Gleanings*, ii. 170. He says: "Though the Arthurian romance be no epic, it does not follow that no epic can be made out of it. It is grounded on certain leading characters, men and women, conceived upon models of extraordinary grandeur; and as the Laureate has evidently grasped the genuine law which makes man, and not the mere acts of man, the base of epic song, we should not be surprised were he hereafter to realise the great achievement towards which he seems to be feeling his way. . . . We do not despair of seeing Mr. Tennyson achieve, on the basis he has chosen, the structure of a full-formed epic."

<sup>2</sup> Taine, *Hist. Eng. Lit.* ii. 530; R. Noel, *Essays on Poetry and Poets*, p. 242; Stedman, *Victorian Poets*, p. 175.

echoes" that the poet had originally selected the theme for epical treatment, but after trial had found the task too complex to be worked out in a straight line.

" 'You know,' said Frank, 'he burnt  
His epic, his King Arthur, some twelve books,' "

from which we may infer at least the temporary postponement of a young poet's too ambitious design. But the bantering style of this dialogue seems to imply that the "great argument" was still latent in his mind. And can it be said that any epic ever grew "insensibly," save in so far as all artistic composition is gradual, a matter of developing and filing and polishing a general idea; for no work of art, poem, statue, picture, or musical theme, ever sprang in full panoply from its maker's brain.

But now that the poem has come full circle it is clear to us that from the first the poet had a tangible scheme, a beginning, a middle, and an end, working and shaping itself in his mind.

In giving us the *Passing of Arthur* first, he implied the precedent conception of the epical story. It is as though Merlin had moulded that one statue of Arthur, "with a crown, and peaked wings pointing to the Northern Star," before he set about constructing the mighty Hall of Camelot, and its four zones of sculpture, set betwixt with many a mystic symbol.

If we take this edifice as the type of Tennyson's work, in the sense that Merlin meant it to be the type of Arthur's aims and deeds, we shall see a spiritual

unity pervading the *Idylls*; from the very beginning

“Mens agitat molem et magno se corpore miscet.”

The fifty years' toil of the workman is not to be confounded with the originating conception of the architect who planned

“This immense  
And glorious work of fine intelligence.”

It is not an easy matter to classify intellectual products into genera and species according to rigidly scientific formulæ, for no two are exactly alike in structure or treatment; the more original the creative mind, the greater its tendency to diverge from preceding models. But if we may say that there are epics and epics; if we grant that an epic may have unity of subject without unity of action, may have spiritual unity rather than dramatic unity; then we may surely assert that the *Idylls of the King* belongs to the class of episodical epics, of which there are many, from the *Shah Namah* downwards; or if we must narrow our definition still further, we may conclude that the poet has here created a new form, which future ages will probably call the Tennysonian or idyllic epic.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are some who hold that a true epic is only possible in a primitive state of society. In the Introduction to the *Heroic Tales* from Ferdusi Mrs. Zimmermann puts forward this view; and Mr. Lang in his paper already mentioned implies the same;—but though I cannot call the seventeenth century primitive, I cannot deny to *Paradise Lost* the rank of a true epic, as this theory would seemingly require me to do. The theory has a half-truth in it; we are told that half-truths are only dangerous when they set up to be whole truths, so we may leave it.

## CHAPTER III

### SOME ARTHURIAN CHARACTERS AND LOCALITIES

LET us next briefly consider, from an antiquarian point of view, the chief personages and localities mentioned in the *Idylls*.

Without going back to the nature-myths that probably underlie most of our primitive traditions, some interesting derivations of the names of characters in the Arthurian legend may be noted. The earliest names are of Celtic origin, and the Romantic names are either adaptations or translations of the Celtic forms.

Thus the name Arthur originally denoted the Bear, Arcturus or ἄρκτος, and that constellation is still called in Welsh the Chariot of Arthur. Grimm says that the Bear plays an important rôle in star-myths, and Wollmer calls Arthur a half-historical, half-mythological personage, in the former aspect connected with over six hundred place-names, and in the latter representing the constellation of the Great Bear; while the

Round Table denotes the circle that it describes round the polar star.<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson touches on this in the *Holy Grail*, l. 681 :  
 "The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round," so  
 called "because they roll through such a round in  
 heaven." Compare the *Princess*—

"Till the Bear had wheeled  
 Through a great arc his seven slow suns."

Arthur, the warrior as fierce as the bear, is in the bardic poems called the son of the King of Darkness, Uther of the Dragon's head, Penn Dragon; Gorlois denotes the cloud, or rain-cloud; Igerne is the human mother of the demi-god. The golden Dragon of the great Pendragonship (*Gwinevere*, l. 593) becomes Uther's emblem, worn on his helmet.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Grimm, *Deutsche Mythol.* p. 633, ed. 1854 : "Björn war ein beiname des Thôrr, und nach den welschen sage wurde König *Artur* als bär und gott dargestellt, was man nicht erst aus einer ähnlichkeit des namens mit *ἄρκτος* zu leiten hat : der bär am himmel spielt eine grosse rolle." See also Wollmer, *Wörterb. der Mythol.* p. 326, ed. 1836. Villemarqué, *Myrddian*, p. 24, ed. 1862 : "Arthur le guerrier, terrible comme l'ours." Grimm says that Arthur became the Spectral Huntsman, with his hounds and horns of Elfhound. Perhaps Tennyson refers to this in the *Holy Grail*, l. 110 : "It is not Arthur's use to hunt by moonlight." Vide also W. K. Kelly's *Curiosities of Indo-Eur. Trad.* p. 282 ; and for the sun-myth interpretation of the saga, Cox's *Comp. Mythol. and Folklore*, pp. 310-343. The classical legend of Callisto is told in Ovid, *Fasts*, ii. 153-192 ; compare Chaucer, *Knights Tale*, l. 1200. See *Biographic Univ.*, vol. 53, *Mythologie*, under the headings Arcas, Brauronia, and Callisto. Curiously, a table (τράπεζα) comes into the story of Arcas also.

<sup>2</sup> A dragon appeared in the sky at the time of Vortigern's death, and Merlin interpreted the portent to designate Uther as king. After his victory, Uther caused two dragons of gold to be made ; one he



Passing into the semi-mythic hero, Arthur, like Theseus, rides the land of monsters, and of "wolf-like men, worse than the wolves." He conquers Europe; he possesses magical arms: the sword, variously called Caledvwlch, Excalibur, Escalibore, Caliburn (all from the Celtic, and meaning "cut-steel"), Mirandoise ("wondrous"), Broun-steel (compare "bright brown sword" in the ballad of *Old Robin*, Percy, ii. 140), and Mord-dure ("bite hard"); the spear Rhongomyant or Rone; and the shield Wynebgrwthucher, more usually called Pridwen or Priwen (the "beautiful one"), from the picture of the Virgin Mary painted on it.<sup>1</sup>

The Round Table, suggested by the movements of the Great Bear round the pole star, was made by Merlin for Uther, "in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right"; and Tennyson, following these words of Malory's, though probably with a deeper intent as well, makes Arthur declare that

"The whole Round Table is dissolved,  
Which was an image of the mighty world."<sup>2</sup>

---

dedicated to Heaven, the other he caused to be borne at the head of his army. Hence his name, Penn (head) Dragon. The Welsh, like the Bretons, says De Villemarqué, have lost the clue to the significance of the emblem, the dragon or serpent symbolising sovereignty (*Myrddinn*, p. 114; Ellis, *Metr. Rom.* p. 25).

<sup>1</sup> See *Coming of Arthur*, I. 285; *Elaine*, I. 291; *Passing of Arthur*, I. 271; *Faerie Queene*, I. vii. 29-37, II. iii. 18, II. viii. 20; Malory, II. iii.; Cox, *Comp. Myth.* p. 317; *Genff. of Monm.* p. 234 (Bohn); Villemarqué, *Table R.* p. 9; *Myrddinn*, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Malory, XIV. ii., II. xix.; *Passing of Arthur*, I. 452. See also Brewer, *Phrase and Fable*, "Round Table"; Malory, III. i.; Villemarqué, *Myrddinn*, p. 166.

Round Tables seem to have been common in feudal times, in the sense either of orders of chivalry or of knightly gatherings and tournaments. In the old French *Roman de Merlin* (Hélie's), Arthur's Round Table is said to be that table at which the Last Supper of Christ and his Apostles was eaten; it had room for fifty; those who sat at it had any pleasant food they desired, and any one who dared to sit in the forbidden chair, the Siege Perilous, in which Christ had sat, sank and disappeared as lead melts in fire (Villemarqué).

Tennyson seems to regard the chair as symbolising the temptations of sense; even Merlin yielded to these temptations—sat in this chair made by himself and was lost; but Galahad loses himself for Christ, and so is safe in it (*Holy Grail*, ll. 172-178).

According to Malory's story, Merlin set up the Round Table at Cardeuil for Uther, who gave it to Leodegran, from whom Arthur received it as part of Guinevere's dowry; Malory gives one hundred and fifty knights as its complement, besides the seat of peril.

Comparative mythology seems to show that the Grail and the Table, in their common property of providing all kinds of delicious food, are both forms of the same "vessel of plenty," which may be traced back to the lotus of Egypt and the Yoni of India (Cox, *Comp. Myth.* p. 320).

Lancelot's name at his christening was Galahad, the

name he gave to the son that Elaine, daughter of King Pelles or Pellam, bore him ; but Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, took charge of him from his birth (see *Elaine*, l. 1392), and "confirmed" him Lancelot of the Lake.

The *L* of Lancelot is only the French definite article ; and *ancelot* is a derivative from the old French *ancel*, a servant, Latin *ancilla*. The name thus appears an exception to the statement that the principal names are of Celtic origin ; but in fact this is not so.

The character of the romantic Lancelot is in all essential points a reproduction of that of Mael, or Meluas, a British chieftain, contemporary of Arthur. The name *Mael* in Celtic means *servant*, and is therefore literally translated by *ancelot*.

In the bardic poems he is represented as disguising himself as a satyr, and carrying off Guinevere (Villemarqué, *Table R.* p. 58) ; he seems to be the wicked Maglocune, apostrophised by Gildas (pp. 318-320), and to have supplied materials for two fictitious characters, the chivalrous Lancelot and the wicked Modred. Lancelot first appears in story about 1150, as an idealised reproduction of the semi-historical Mael.

In the Arthurian romances it is Merlin who brings Guinevere to Arthur, and Tennyson seems to have thought of substituting Lancelot as her conductor, from the analogous story of Tristram and Isolt.

We are told that Tristram brought Isolt (Isoud) from Ireland to be the bride of his uncle, King Mark. Isolt's maid, Brangwen, had been entrusted with a golden

cup containing a love-potion which she was to administer to Isolt and Mark on their marriage-day, that they might love each other for ever; but on the voyage from Ireland, Isolt drank of the magic potion, and gave the cup to Tristram, who drank of it also. From that moment their fatal love began; and if we admit such a cause for it, the question of their moral culpability cannot be raised, as they drank in ignorance of the powers of the potion.

Tennyson does not introduce any magic potion into the story of Lancelot and the Queen—there needed no charm save youth and love; but he gives us to understand that when Lancelot came as Arthur's envoy to ask for Guinevere, she thought he was Arthur himself and so fixed her love on him. The result is the same in Lancelot's case as in Tristram's: the ambassador and the Queen become lovers, and faith unfaithful falsely keeps them true.

Malory makes Lancelot explain to Arthur that he is so devoted to Guinevere because once—on the day he received knighthood—she saved him from ridicule; he had forgotten to bring his sword, but she had brought it hidden in her dress and gave it to him in time (XVIII. vii.)

Another curious point of resemblance between the Tristram and Lancelot stories is, that as Tristram is connected with two Isolts, Mark's wife and the Princess of Brittany, so Lancelot is connected with two Elaines, Pelles's daughter who bore him Galahad, and the lily maid of Astolat.

We may hence perceive the manner in which the original legends came to be split up and amplified. The story of Gareth and Lynette similarly has its double in that of the Youth-with-the-ill-shapen-Coat (La Cote Male Taile) and the Damoysel Maldisant or Abusive-Young-Lady (Malory, IX. iii.); and other examples might be mentioned.

Tristram, or Tristan, has in Celtic the meaning "impetuous"; but the French writers connected the word with F. *triste*, Lat. *tristis*, sad, and said that his mother, Mark's sister, dying in bearing him, named him Tristram, the child born in sorrow (Malory, VIII. i. ii.)

The superficial features of the character of Tristram are represented by Tennyson much as we find them marked in the old story; Tristram is "a harper," says Malory, "passing all other, that there was none such called in no country, and so in harping and on instruments of music he applied himself in youth for to learn. And after as he growed in might and strength he laboured ever in hunting and in hawking, so that never gentleman more that ever we heard tell of" (*Morte Darthur*, VIII. iii.)

The Celtic name *Gwenhwyvar* (the "White Ghost") appears in the romances under the forms *Guanhumara* (Geoffrey), *Guinevera*, *Guinever*, *Genièvre*, *Ginevra*, *Gaynour*, *Geneure*, *Ganore*, etc.; her character is more strongly marked in the old poems and romances than

it is in the *Idylls*. The romance-writers paint this Arthurian Helen in great detail as a woman of violent, passionate nature; she is jealous, proud, quick to anger, cruel and vindictive. Geoffrey of Monmouth (pp. 238, 254) says that Guanhumara was descended from a noble family of Romans; she wedded Modred during Arthur's absence on his Roman expedition, and when he returned she became a nun. In the *Romance of Lancelot* she is called Gwennere, daughter of King Rion of Ireland.

As Tennyson has softened the character of Guinevere, he has had to tone down the story of Modred (Mordred) also.

The Mordred of Malory is the son of Arthur<sup>1</sup> and his half-sister, Margawse, whom Arthur loved, not knowing that she was akin to him. Thus Mordred, like Polynices, becomes the instrument of divine Nemesis, and punishes Arthur for his sin.

Tennyson has necessarily rejected this horrible story, both as degrading the character of his "blameless king," and as introducing a motive incapable of chaste treatment in a modern poem. But this rejection has imposed on him the need of otherwise accounting for Modred's implacable hatred of Arthur's reformed chivalry. The

<sup>1</sup> Malory, I. xvii. xviii. Geoffrey makes him son of Lot and Arthur's sister Anne (=Margawse=Bellicent), *Hist. Brit.* p. 238; in the *Romance of Merlin* he is son of Lot and Bellicent, which Tennyson follows.

poet accordingly represents Modred as a man of inorose nature, filled with a satanic ambition and a satanic hatred of all lofty aspiration.

It is very interesting to note the minute and subtle touches by which this view of Modred's character is indicated; the steady growth of his malignity is traced from boyhood to manhood.

The child Modred is father to the man. He first appears as an eavesdropper, laying his ear beside the door and half hearing; then he bites his thin lips and is mute when Gawain praises Gareth's skill; later, when Gawain's shield is blazoned with many a deed, Modred's is still "blank as death." When, after Pelleas's outbreak, the Queen and her lover foresee the dolorous day that draws near, Modred thinks that the time is hard at hand when he will be able to strike; with "narrow face," "all ear and eye," he climbs to spy some secret scandal if he may; his "narrow foxy face, heart-liding smile, and gray persistent eye," make Guinevere shudder. Vivien acts as his intelligencer, and brings him upon Lancelot's farewell meeting with the Queen. Then he leagues himself with the heathen Saxons, and during Arthur's absence oversea usurps the realm; and at last, in the fatal fight of Camlan, he smites Arthur on the helm and is himself slain by the last stroke of Excalibur.<sup>1</sup> Thus our sympathies are all with Arthur.

<sup>1</sup> See *Coming of Arthur*, l. 332; *Gareth*, ll. 28-31, 409; *Pelleas*, l. 597; *Tournament*, l. 166; *Guinevere*, ll. 24, 62, 99, 151, 193, 436, 568; *Passing*, l. 165. Malory calls him Mordred; Geoffrey and De Boron, Modred.

Modred is altogether hateful, for it is not love of goodness that makes him expose things evil.

Tennyson, to bring his story still clearer of the old foul Malory version, changes the name of King Lot's wife, Margawse, to Bellicent; and tells how Arthur comforted her when in childhood she had been beaten for some fault of which she was innocent. The name Bellicent or Belisent was found by the poet in the metrical *Romance of Merlin*; it is a name of frequent occurrence in mediæval legend. Thus Valentine and Orson are the children of a Lady Bellisent, or Bellisance as she is called in the ballad (Percy, *Rel.* ii. 311). There is a maid Belisent in the similar story of Amis and Amiloun, in Weber's *Metr. Rom.* ii. 438; and Spenser mentions a knight Sir Bellisont in *F. Q.*, V. iii. 5. The name Modred, Medrod, or Mordred, Sir Geo. Cox supposes to betoken "the murderer, biter, or crusher."<sup>1</sup>

Mark (Marc'h means "horse" in Celtic, as Hengist and Horsa do in Saxon) is in Malory represented as having been at first friendly with Arthur; but Tennyson's Arthur repudiates Mark from the very beginning, for having tarnished the great name of King—"a man of plots, craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings" (*Gareth*, l. 423). He comes next to

<sup>1</sup> *Introd. Comp. Mythol.* p. 336. According to Geoffrey, Uther and Igerma have a son named Arthur and a daughter Anne. Anne marries Lot of Londinesia, a consul and a brave knight, *Hist. Brit.* p. 227.



Modred, and is the "second villain" of Tennyson's story.

Gawain is the romance form of Walweyn or Galwan, from Walwanus or Galwanus, the Latinised form of the name of the great Celtic hero, Gwalchmai, the famous "Hawk of battle." Gwalchmai is celebrated by the bards for his wise counsel and persuasive eloquence; he is the bardic Odysseus, the typical sage counsellor—hence often called Gwalchmai of the tongue of gold—and in general he performs the duties of the herald or ambassador of Arthur.

The Gawain of the *Idylls* is a very different character from this. It is he "whom men call Light-of-love"; his courtesy has "a touch of traitor" in it; he is "a reckless and irreverent knight," blind to holy things; the quest of the Grail is not for such as he.<sup>1</sup>

In thus representing Gawain, Tennyson goes even farther than Malory, who departs from the traditional view of Gwalchmai's character in his portrait of Sir Gawain.

Sir Edward Strachey sees a proof of Malory's art in thus giving us a new Gawain with a strongly individual character of his own; but if we "must grieve, when even the shade of that which once was great has passed away," we cannot yield our approval to Malory for thus having destroyed the noble figure of Gwalchmai.

<sup>1</sup> *Pelleas*, l. 353; *Elaine*, l. 634; *Grail*, ll. 757, 873. Globe ed. Malory, p. xiii.

As he is represented in the *Mabinogion*, he is far worthier of our contemplation than we find him to be either in Malory or in Tennyson.

Geraint, or Ghérent, and Enid in the bardic songs correspond somewhat to the Erec and Enide of Chrestien de Troyes. Geraint's kingdom of Dyvnaint is supposed to have been Devon. In the French romance *Edyrn* becomes *Ider*, son of *Nuz*. Tennyson in both his *Geraint Idylls* follows the story as it is given in the *Mabinogion*, or *Childish Tales*, translated from the Welsh Red Book of Hergest (*Llyfr Coch o Hergest*) by Lady Charlotte Guest. The story of Enid, the long-suffering wife, may be compared with that of Griselda, told by Boccaccio, and learned at Padua of Petrarch by Chaucer's Clerke of Oxenforde. These Idylls deserve close comparison with the Welsh story of Geraint, the son of Erbin.

There is little to be said of Gareth, or Sir Beaumayns (Fair Hands), as Kay called him; but the Linet (Lynette) of Malory and Tennyson is a very different person from the Luned, daughter of King Brychen, famed for her beauty in the Welsh poems and stories. Lady Guest (*Mab.* p. 53) says that Luned has been identified with a fair maiden named Elined, "the Almedha of Giraldus Cambrensis, who says that she suffered martyrdom." Excepting her

name, there is nothing to connect Malory's *damoyssel savage* with this Welsh maiden.

Kay, Kay-le-long, the Seneschal of Arthur, is another hero of the bards who has undergone a loss of dignity in the French romances.

In the Welsh Triads (poetical groups of threes, as the three greatest bards, three greatest beauties, etc.) Cai is called one of the "three diadem'd chiefs of battle, and is said to have been possessed of magical powers, by which he could transform himself into any shape he pleased" (*Mab.* p. 40). In the romances he is called Kai, Keu, or Queux; the latter form suggesting a connection with the old French word for *cook*, whence the story of his having the supervision of the meats and drinks, as we find both in Malory and in Tennyson. In the *Idylls* he is certainly the "most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall," ever reviling others and ever bringing disgrace and overthrow on himself in consequence. Yet Arthur loved him, for he was his foster-brother, son of old Sir Ector.<sup>1</sup>

For the name of Vivien Tennyson is indebted to

<sup>1</sup> In *Sir Percival of Galles*, l. 263, he is called "Kay the bold baratour," which seems to mean quarreller (*vide* Mayhew's *Dict. Mod. Eng.* s.v. Baret, deceit, strife); "Sir Kay the 'crabbit,' always overbearing and always beaten," Robson, *Introd. to Three Metr. Rom.* p. xxiii., ed. Camden Soc. In the story of Peredur, on which that of Percival is founded, he appears in the same light.

the old *Romance of Merlin*, in which the enchanter is said to be in love with Viviane, the Lady of the Lake; but Tennyson's Lady of the Lake and his Vivien are widely different personages, the former being one of those mystic "powers that walk the world," such a guardian angel of Arthur's realm as Dryden foreshadowed; while the idyllic Vivien is a merely mischievous Circe, a woman-devil, false and pitiless, without a conscience and without a heart, an emissary of Mark's and an ally of Modred's, whose aim and purpose is to sap the purity and troth of Arthur's knighthood. She effects her purpose by enticing the foolish and by slandering the wise, spying here and there and sowing ill hints from ear to ear, like poison in the living waters (*Vivien*, l. 141).

In the *Morte Darthur* she is named Nimue, Nineue, or Nynyue, the "chief Lady of the Lake," and is with the "three fair queens" (Arthur's sister Morgan le Fay, the Queen of North Wales, and the Queen of the Waste Lands) who lead Arthur away in the barge to the vale of Avalon. In the *Suite de Merlin* she is called Niviene (Sommer, iii. 120). After Merlin is disposed of she loves Sir Pelleas, as we shall see when we come to the idyll of *Pelleas and Ettarre*.

The metrical *Morte Arthur* (Ellis, p. 143), and the Breton stories, call her Viviane, which the French romance-writers interpret "I do nothing," and call a Chaldæan word! But it is, as Villemarqué shows,

merely the Celtic *Chwiblian* or *Viblian*, and means "nymph."<sup>1</sup>

In the *Roman de Merlin* she is said to be the daughter of a fairy, and really falls in love with Merlin, who, having assumed the form of a handsome young student out for his holiday, loves her ardently in return. In this way the incongruity of the gray-bearded hundred-wintered lover is got rid of; his fancy turns to thoughts of love as lightly as Faust's does when he has drunk the Sibyl's charmed draught.

But Merlin, though "seeing all his own mischance," tells Viviane his magic secrets, and she then prisons him in a thorn-bush, which becomes an enchanted castle. Malory says that she shuts him beneath a mighty stone; but Tennyson makes him lie as dead within the hollow oak, impotent type of effete Druidism, lost to life and use for evermore.

The old histories make mention of two Merlins, one surnamed "le Sauvage," the other "Emrys" or Ambrosius. The latter is the enchanter of history and romance. The two are frequently confounded, but their careers may be separately traced in Geoffrey's *History*, or in Villemarqué's treatise on Merlin or Myrdhinn.

This distinguished French scholar states that the name Merlin is French, and that it has various forms in other languages, as Marthin amongst the ancient Britons,

<sup>1</sup> *Myrdhinn*, p. 205. Wordsworth calls her Nina in his *Egyptian Maid*.

Myrdhin in modern Welsh, Marzin in Armorican, and Meller or Melzian in Scottish. He traces the origin of the name to the *Marsi*, who were snake-charmers and magicians under the Roman emperors, and were supposed to be descended from *Marsus*, one of the minor gods of classical mythology. The name *Marsum* in a Latin and Saxon glossary of the ninth century is translated *Vyrmgalere* (lit. worm-singer, snake-charmer), *serpentum incantator*. At the close of the era of paganism, the minor household gods had taken the place of the greater gods of Celtic antiquity, as those guardian genii were believed to bestow a closer attention upon the interests of their particular protégés than the greater gods did. They even loved human maidens, who bore them superhuman offspring.<sup>1</sup> The *Romance of Merlin* (Sommer, iii. 17; cf. Ellis, p. 82; *Myrdhinn*, p. 146) tells us that Merlin was thus engendered, the offspring of an evil spirit and a mortal maiden; but the aim of the demons—to procreate a demonic human being to corrupt mankind—a Satanic Incarnation to oppose the Divine Incarnation—was frustrated by the pious hermit Bleys or Blaise, who at once christened the new-born babe, and foiled the devil's schemes. The babe, Merlin, the "wondrous one," thus possessed the wisdom of the serpent without its guile, and served man well instead of ruining him body and soul.

<sup>1</sup> Compare Brian in the *Lady of the Lake*. The account of Merlin in the text is mostly translated from *Myrdhinn, ou l'enchanteur Merlin*, par le Vicomte H. de Villemarqué, Paris, Didier, 1862, 435 pages.

This Bleys (mentioned by Tennyson as Merlin's master) is said by M. de Villemarqué (*Myrd.* 146) to be identical with Saint Lupus, bishop of Troyes, and apostle of the Bretons in the fifth century. The Latin *Lupus* and the Celtic *Blaid*, pronounced *Blais* and written *Bleiz* in the Armorican dialect, alike signify *Wolf*. Merlin, we are told, sent Bleys to the forests of Northumberland, where he dwelt as a hermit and recorded his pupil's prophecies in a book.

Coming next to the story of the Holy Grail, three persons call for particular notice, Percivale, Galahad, and Pellam.

Percivale in the Breton lays replaces the Peredur of the *Mabinogion* and the bardic poems, but both Percivale and Peredur mean the "Companion of the Dish," or Grail, from the Celtic *Per*, dish, and *cyffwrill*, *Keval*, companion; also *Kedur*, contracted *-edur*, companion (*v. Table II*, pp. 144, 147).

The old romances deal with Percivale's early life, when he ran wild in the woods, dwelling in solitude with his mother Dame Achellour, Arthur's sister.

The English metrical *Percival of Galles* (in the Thornton Romances) makes no mention of Percivale's quest of the Grail; but Chrestien of Troyes works out this episode very fully, and Malory seems to have mainly followed his account of Percival.

In the *Morte Darthur* King Pelles (or Pellam) of Listeneise is the hereditary custodian of the holy dish. This Grail, which Tennyson describes as a cup, was the dish in which the paschal lamb had been placed at the Last Supper, and it was subsequently used by Joseph of Arimathea to catch the blood that flowed from the Saviour's wounds. Joseph was imprisoned by the Jews for over forty years, during all which time he was given no food, but was miraculously sustained by the Holy Grail. When at last he was set free, he came to Britain, and his descendants guarded the blessed relics, this dish, and the spear that inflicted the sacrilegious wound.

The word *grail* is old French from low Latin *gradale*, akin to Latin *crater* and Greek *κράτης*, a bowl. The spelling has been vitiated through a mistaken derivation of *San Greal* from *Sang real*, real blood, *sanguis realis*.

Poets like Chrestien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach gave free play to their imaginations in describing the properties of the sacred vessel. "Every Good Friday," says Mr. Baring Gould, "a white dove descended from heaven, bearing a white oblation which it laid before the Grail. The holy vessel gave oracles, expressed miraculously in characters which appeared on the surface of the bowl, and then vanished. Spiritual blessings attended on the vision and custody of the sacred vessel; the guardians, and those who were privileged to behold it, were conscious of a mysterious internal joy, a foretaste of that of heaven. The material blessings are easier to be described. The Grail stood in



the place of all food, it supplied its worshippers with the meats they most desired and the drinks most to their taste; it maintained them in perpetual youth. The day on which the Grail had been seen, its guardians were incapable of being wounded or suffering any hurt. If they fought for eight days after the vision, they were susceptible of wounds but not of death.”<sup>1</sup>

This will enable us to appreciate the supreme importance of the Grail in the spiritual creed of mythical chivalry. When it shone before the knights at Camelot the necessity became inevitable that they should leave all and follow it.

King Pelles or Pellam (both these names for him are in Malory: Pellam, which Tennyson adopts, in Bk. II.; Pelles in Bks. XI. to XVII.) was one of the hereditary guardians of the Grail, and consequently traced his lineage to Joseph of Arimathea. Balin gave him the “dolorous stroke” that Galahad healed (II. xv. xvi.) Galahad traced his lineage both through his father and his mother back to Joseph, and farther, as will be seen in another chapter.

The remaining characters, such as Bedivere, the cup-bearer; Ulfius, the chamberlain; Brastias, the warden of the country north of Trent, etc., call for no special

<sup>1</sup> *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, Second Series, p. 343. Sir Edward Strachey, having seen the Grail, describes it minutely. It is still preserved in the Cathedral Church of Genoa. *Introd. Malory*, Globe ed. 1891, p. xix.

remark ; but something may be said of little Sir Dagonet, King Arthur's jester.

In chivalric times the dwarf was nearly as essential a part of the errant knight or damsel's outfit as the Gladstone bag is of the modern tourist's. One marvels where all the dwarfs can have come from ; every knight with the slightest respect for appearances was followed by one at least, and some possessed "dwarfesses" as well. Many of these dwarfs were cheery and jocular little folk, but others were harsh and crabbed. They generally reflected their masters' characters.

Tennyson gives us a specimen of each variety. In the *Marriage of Geraint*, the dwarf of Edyrn is

"Vicious, old, and irritable,  
And doubling all his master's vice of pride."

Perhaps it is partly to counterbalance him that the poet gives us the cheery, quick-witted, tender-hearted little jester, who dances before the hall, and from under the stalking-horse of his folly shoots the arrows of his wit. The Dagonet of the *Idylls* is a dwarf and a court-jester, whom Tristram has in mockery dubbed knight ; Malory's Sir Dagonet, on the other hand, is a brave knight, fond of mirth and jest as Sir Dinadan is ; but, like him also, able to give a swashing blow when required. We have Shakspere's authority, moreover, for deeming him a tall man of his hands, for was not Master Shallow, when he lay at Clement's Inn, Sir Dagonet in Arthur's show ?

Tennyson's Dagonet, like Shelley's Archy, seems to be modelled on the fools of Shakspeare, and like them to have a vein of pathos even deeper than his humour.

Books have been written on the Arthurian localities, and much learned ingenuity has been expended in identifying the places named.

There are two main theories regarding the scene of Arthur's exploits.

One set of writers—of whom the late Dr. Guest was the chief—hold that Arthur's actions took place in the southern and western regions of Britain, and identify the various battle-fields, etc., mentioned by Nennius and Geoffrey with places in that region. The upholders of the other theory, on the contrary, following Mr. Skene and Mr. Stuart-Glennie, declare that Arthur was "not a king in South Britain, or rather South Wales, as later writers, from Geoffrey downwards, have always supposed, but a king of the North Britons of southern Scotland and of Cumbria."<sup>1</sup>

The identifications of place-names certainly give strong support to the latter theory. Thus in the list of Arthur's battles (which Lancelot recites to Elaine, ll. 286-300), taken by Tennyson from Nennius, Glein (Tennyson's Glem) is Glen in Ayrshire; Dubglas (Duglas) is in Linnis, that is, Lennox; Cat Coit

<sup>1</sup> *Dict. Nat. Biog. s.v. Arthur.* The fact is, there were *two* Arthurs: the Arthur of dubious history, a North-British general; and the Arthur of fiction, whose deeds are laid in Wales and Armoric Cornwall.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROLOGUE AND EPILOGUE

THE Prologue and Epilogue, for so the "Dedication" and the closing lines "To the Queen" may be called, should be read as integral parts of the work.

The lines "To the Queen" hint at the interpretation that the poet would have us put upon the *Idylls*; and the "Dedication" is not merely a tribute to the memory of a good man, the late Prince Consort, but strikes the keynote of the poem very artistically as well, by introducing the ideal of chivalry that Arthur set before his knights:—

"To reverence the King, as if he were  
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,  
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,  
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,  
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,  
To honour his own word as if his God's,  
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,  
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,  
And worship her by years of noble deeds,  
Until they won her" (see *Guinevere*, ll. 464-479).

Regarded in their literal sense, the *Idylls* picture the temporary success, followed by the failure of this ideal; they tell of "the momentary likeness to the king" that inspired the knights, and of their subsequent falling away from aims too pure and spiritual for them to live up to.<sup>1</sup>

But this was the ideal, says the poet, that inspired Prince Albert; he guided his life according to these lofty principles.

In the line, "Commingle with the gloom of imminent war," there is an allusion to the very strained relations in 1861 between Great Britain and the United States, on account of the affair of the British mail-steamer *Trent*, when a declaration of war was mainly averted by the wise and temperate counsels of the Prince.

During the American Civil War, the *Trent*, bound from Havana to St. Thomas, had been stopped by a Federal warship (8th Nov. 1861) and two passengers seized, on the ground that they were commissioners of the Confederate (southern) States, and therefore rebels. Lord John Russell's firm attitude, controlled by the Prince's tact, led to the ultimate release of the prisoners, but for a time war was imminent. The Prince's share in preventing a declaration of war became known only after his death, which took place on the 14th December 1861. Although he had not been

<sup>1</sup> It should be noticed that Lancelot, the greatest of the knights, and the direct cause of their falling away from Arthur's standard, at no time attempted to fulfil the last article of this vow.

popular during his lifetime, men saw the true greatness of his character when he had passed away. He took a leading part in encouraging social and industrial progress. The success of the great Exhibition of 1851 was mainly due to his efforts, and he was planning the "International Exhibition" (1862) at the time of his death.<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson has several allusions to these two great London Exhibitions. In the Ode sung at the opening of the 1862 Exhibition, he apostrophises the Prince:—

"O silent father of our Kings to be,  
Mourn'd in this golden hour of jubilee,  
For this, for all, we weep our thanks to thee!  
The world-compelling plan was thine," etc.

Compare the lines in the Dedication of the *Idylls*:  
"Thou noble Father of her Kings to be," etc., and also

"Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste,  
To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace."

In the Dedication to the 1851 edition of the Poems, the following stanza (omitted in modern editions) tells that the Queen

"Brought a great design to pass,  
When Europe and the scattered ends  
Of our fierce world were mixt as friends  
And brethren in her halls of glass."

The noble benediction with which the Dedication

*Dict. Nat. Biog.*, article by Sir Theodore Martin. See also *Lord Tennyson*, by H. J. Jennings, p. 178.

of the Poems ends, breathing loyal sympathy, shows how the relations of poets and sovereigns have changed since the times when Spenser addressed the "High and Mightie Emprise Elizabeth," and sang her praises as Gloriana, Queen of Faërie. Spenser dwells on her power, her splendour, and her beauty; but Queen Victoria's laureate blesses her as including a thousand claims to reverence: a good wife, a good mother, and a good Queen. In the same reverential spirit, this Dedication of the *Idylls* consecrates the memory of the Prince Consort, in lines of earthly sorrow and eternal hope.

The Epilogue or *Envoy*, "To the Queen," strikes a more joyful note, recalling that rememberable day in February 1872, when the Prince of Wales, just recovering from that fatal typhoid—the malady that had carried off his father ten years before, and was destined to take his son twenty years later—went with the Queen in solemn procession to St. Paul's, to join the National Thanksgiving for his recovery.

In this Epilogue, as in the Prologue, the poet refers to the thoughts and movements of the years preceding 1872.

The Red River Expedition of 1869 had added the Hudson's Bay Territory (Manitoba) to the Canadian Dominion, but there were grumblers in England who grudging the cost of empire, and clamoured for the release of Canada from her allegiance to the British Crown.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "For some years a feeling was spreading in England," says Mr. J. M'Carthy, "which began to find expression in repeated and very

Tennyson exclaims against such sordid meanness, as unworthy of the nation that gained her empire at Waterloo. The unity of our "crowned republic" must not be broken, he says; and that loyal north, Canada, must not be deserted for the sake of base economy.

But the true imperial voice of England spoke in the enthusiastic plaudits of that day of thanksgiving, and men thus loyal to their sovereign will also be loyal to their fellow-subjects, whether in Canada or in India.

If England does not feel equal to the task of empire, her empire must fall. •

The laureate next asks the Queen, for the sake of him to whose memory these Idylls are inscribed, to accept them as being less a retelling of Malory's and Geoffrey's stories of the dim old Arthur, than a shadowing of the war between "Sense" and "Soul."

There is nothing very recondite in such a moral significance; every great poem that truly reflects the spirit and movement of human life must consciously or unconsciously prefigure this conflict. But Tennyson indicates that his poem has a symbolical as well as a literal meaning, and shadows this conflict of sense and soul for the purpose of teaching a moral lesson.

distinct suggestions that the Canadians had better begin to think of looking out for themselves. Many Englishmen complained of this country being expected to undertake the principal cost of the defences of Canada, and to guarantee her railway schemes, especially when the commercial policy which Canada adopted towards England was one of a strictly protective character."—*Hist. of Our Own Times*, iv. 53.



What that moral lesson is we shall see as we study the poem itself.

The employment of the word "Sense" to represent the flesh as something inherently antagonistic to the soul, as evil is to good, is often considered too puritanic and narrow; but in fact such a use of the term is common in the language of ascetic mysticism in all countries. The sense that destroys the soul is sensuality, the lust of the flesh, self-indulgence trampling down the boundaries of duty, as in the great crime of Lancelot and of Guinevere, or the sin of Tristram, or the treachery of Ettarre, or the fatuity of Merlin.

The lofty ideal of Arthur is assailed by two lusts, fleshly desire (as in the cases just mentioned), and lawless power, as in Modred and others.

After explaining the inner meaning of the *Idylls*, the laureate prays for blessings on the Queen, and that Heaven may hold back from her reign the storm-clouds that are gathering on the social and political horizon. These approaching dangers lie especially in the self-indulgence of the rich, corrupting the old vigorous spirit of energy and enterprise; in the deepening discontent of the lower orders; in the immorality of art due to French influence; and in the antagonism between the classes, intelligent but selfish, and the masses, uninformed but politically powerful, and dominating state affairs to their own detriment. The same ideas as we have here expressed find an earlier utterance in the seventh stanza of the *Ode on the Death*

of the Duke of Wellington, and a later and fuller and more emphatic one in *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*.

It is important to place these fears for the future beside Wordsworth's, in his Milton sonnet, in that beginning "Oh Friend! I know not which way I must look For comfort," and in the lines:—

"When I have borne in mem'ry what has tamed  
Great nations; how ennobling thoughts depart  
When men change swords for ledgers, and desert  
The student's bower for gold,—some fears unnamed  
I had, my country," etc.

But as the general average of political prudence and social comfort tends to rise, although the power of a particularly able political class is decreasing, there is still hope that Tennyson's forebodings may prove as ill-founded as Wordsworth's have done.

The reference to art corrupted by "poisonous honey stolen from France" may be illustrated from *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, as already mentioned, and by the following passage from Goldwin Smith's *Essays* (p. 73, Toronto ed.): "As to French novels, Carlyle says of one of the most famous of the last century that after reading it you ought to wash seven times in Jordan; but after reading the French novels of the present day, in which lewdness is sprinkled with sentimental rose-water, and deodorised, but not disinfected, your washings had better be seventy times seven."

But these gloomy forebodings may be only morning

clouds, says the poet, that the sun will dissolve, although they now seem so dark and ominous. Still, the future is behind them, and the outlook is not encouraging, while not absolutely hopeless.

Tennyson's early *Morte Darthur* ended with a dream of dawning hope; but years, and their philosophic mind, have given a sombre hue to the lines with which he here concludes. Yet after all, he adds, if the old English "crowning common-sense" does not at last fail, these fears are vain.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Saving common-sense," *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. For this use of "saving" compare *Dunciad*, iii. 98: "And saving Ignorance enthrones by laws."

## CHAPTER V

### THE COMING OF ARTHUR

EACH of the ten "Round Table" Idylls comprehends a separate episode in the story of the knights, or of Merlin, or of Guinevere; and the *Coming* and *Passing* of Arthur form a setting or framework to the series.

✓ The *Coming of Arthur* introduces the hero to us at the point of time when, having established himself on the throne, and founded his order of knighthood, he is summoned by Leodegran, a neighbouring king, to assist him in restoring his country, Cameliard, to a civilised condition, and in resisting the Saxons who are invading it. Arthur goes to his aid, and, on arriving with his army at Leodegran's capital, beholds Guinevere standing by the castle wall. She does not notice him, for he wears no insignia to distinguish him among his knights, but Arthur loves her from that moment. He defeats the invaders, rids the land of wild beasts, and clears openings in the forests. When he returns to his own kingdom he finds his vassals in revolt. The image

of Guinevere fills his thoughts wholly, and he feels that she is essential to the fulfilment of his dreams of social regeneration. The thought of her gives strength to him, and he gains a complete victory over the rebels, but stops the pursuit and grants them peace.

Lancelot is introduced as rejoicing with Arthur in the hour of triumph, and on the field of death the two warriors swear undying love to each other. Arthur sends ambassadors to ask for the hand of Guinevere, but her father, although Arthur has saved his kingdom for him, hesitates about the answer he will give. Thus the poet is enabled to introduce naturally the various legends about Arthur's origin.

First, the old chamberlain (whose advice, like that of the vizier usually in oriental tales, is quite useless) says that only Merlin and Bleys can answer the king's question. Then the envoys of Arthur are asked, and Bedivere tells the story of Uther and Ygerne—how Uther, for love of Ygerne, killed her husband in battle, and forced her to wed him in unseemly haste; how he died soon after, and how, when Ygerne bore a son, the babe was delivered to Merlin, who gave him to old Sir Anton to rear in secret; how, when Arthur was grown up, Merlin, "through his craft," had him crowned king, against the wishes of the nobles, but in accordance with the clamours of the people.

Still Leodegran is in doubt. Arthur's sister, Bellisent, Queen of Orkney, happens to come to the court of Camelopard, with her two sons, Gawain and young

Modred ; and Leodegran asks her advice. She tells how Arthur bound his knights with solemn vows, and describes his coronation scene, when those mystic powers, the three fair queens, the Lady of the Lake, and Merlin stood beside him. The magic sword Excalibur is also mentioned. But Leodegran questions her more closely still, and she sends her boys away before she gives him answer. Then she tells how Arthur, a boy as she a girl, had come first to her, and had comforted her childish sorrow ; and how he often came to see her after that. And that Bleys the hermit had summoned her to his deathbed, and told her how he and Merlin, on the night when Uther died, had left the room of death to breathe fresh air by the seashore, when suddenly a dragon-shaped vessel came over the waves, and a naked babe was borne down the flaming waters to Merlin's feet. This was Arthur : and so saying, the old hermit died.

But Merlin, says Bellicent, mocked her when she tried to question him on the subject. Still, she adds, Leodegran need not fear to give Guinevere to Arthur, for Merlin has foretold his fame.

Leodegran "sleeps on it"; and that night dreams a dream in which Arthur is transfigured, and appears "in heaven, crowned." He awakes, and sends back the envoy to announce his consent to the marriage. °

Arthur sends Lancelot to fetch the princess, and the marriage is solemnised by Saint Dubricius. All is bright and splendid, and the Lady of the Lake's blessing

mingles with that of Holy Church. But outside, great lords from Rome wait to demand tribute. Arthur's knights chant their paean; Arthur refuses the tribute, and wars with Rome.

This outline will show us how very delicately Tennyson passes over many of the coarser incidents in the old romance. Thus Malory (following Robert de Boron, who follows Geoffrey) describes the seduction of Ygerne as taking place through the instrumentality of Merlin's magic. Merlin disguises Uther as Gorlois, and, the night Gorlois is killed, the disguised Uther visits Ygerne as her husband. Subsequently Uther marries Ygerne, and she confesses to him that she does not know who is the father of the child that she is about to bear. Uther reveals the deception that he had practised, and Ygerne makes "great joy."<sup>1</sup> Merlin comes to Uther and says that the child should be given to Sir Ector to rear. As soon as born it is to be delivered to Merlin at "yonder privy postern unchristened."

Tennyson makes Uther die, "moaning and wailing for an heir to rule"; but Malory says that Uther fell sick two years after Arthur's birth, and on his death-bed declared to the barons his will that his son Arthur should succeed him.

It has already been shown (chap. iii.) that the story of Bellicent is quite different from that of Margawse;

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey's *Hist.* (Bohn, pp. 224-226); Sommer, iii. 14.

Modred is King Lot's son in Tennyson's poem ; in the romance he is the son of Arthur.

In Malory, again, Merlin warns Arthur against marrying Guenever ; he praises her beauty but says no word in praise of her goodness. However, "there a man's heart is set," says Merlin, "he will be loth to return."<sup>1</sup> "That is truth," said King Arthur. "But Merlin warned the King covertly that Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Lancelot should love her, and she him again." But in spite of this warning, Merlin is despatched to Leodegrance, who joyfully assents. "That is to me, said King Leodegrance, the best tidings that ever I heard, that so worthy a King of prowess and noblesse should wed my daughter."

The supernatural details relating to the three fairy queens and the Lady of the Lake are much altered by Tennyson, and it will be seen that he has treated the main facts of the story with such freedom as greatly to reduce the amount of his obligations to Malory. This may be said without forgetting that but for Malory we should not have had the *Idylls* at all.

The following summary will assist the student in working out the detailed and lengthy comparison with Malory for himself.

For Arthur's birth and early life, see *Morte Darthur*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> So in the Icelandic legend of the Burnt Njal, Hrut says: "It is plainly of no avail to reason with a man whose heart is set upon a woman."



(Globe ed.), Bk. I. chaps. i. to vii., and xix. For the struggle with the vassals, I. xii.-xv. Arthur's love for Guinevere, I. xvi. Arthur's seeking her in marriage, III. i. ii. Arthur's destruction foretold by Merlin, I. xvii. xviii. Arthur's sword and the Lady of the Lake, I. xxiii.; compare II. iii. and xi. Merlin's prophecy that Arthur will not die, XXI. vii. Roman tribute demanded; Arthur strives with Rome, I. xxi.; V. i. ii., etc. Lancelot's love for Guinevere begins, VI. i. Merlin brings her to Arthur, III. i.; marriage of Arthur and Guinevere, III. v. Arthur the father of Mordred, I. xvii. xviii. Geoffrey's account may also be easily consulted in Bohn's *Six Old English Chronicles*.

In the opening lines Tennyson describes very closely the state of affairs that existed in Britain at the time of the landing of Hengist and Horsa—that great event with which “English history begins.” The poet follows Geoffrey's account here. Aurelius Ambrosius (= Emrys) was “a descendant of the last Roman general who claimed the purple as an Emperor in Britain.”<sup>1</sup> He usurped the kingdom that Vortigern had proved unable to hold, and gained some advantages over the Jutes under Hengist, but was overthrown at Wipped's Fleet. After the death of Aurelius by poison, Uther, his brother, ruled for a time, and defeated the Saxons in several battles, but at last was poisoned also. “For there was near the court,” says Geoffrey, “a spring of

<sup>1</sup> Green, *Making of England*, pp. 28, 37.

very clear water, which the King used to drink of. . . . This the detestable conspirators made use of to destroy him, by so poisoning the whole mass of water which sprang up, that the next time the King drank of it he was seized with sudden death, as were also a hundred other persons after him.”<sup>1</sup> After him King Arthur succeeded in keeping back the heathen “for a space”—here fiction comes up to the very limits of history, but does not cross them.

The description of the wolves stealing and suckling human babes is not only based on myths like the Roman legend, but on the well-authenticated fact in natural history that these animals do sometimes suckle human children that they have carried off.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, no known case of children thus reared arriving at maturity. Quite possibly Tennyson is referring to the *λυκάνθρωποι* (lycanthroi) of the Greeks and Romans, the loup-garous of the French, the were-wolves (man-wolves) of the Teutons and English, the Garwals of the Normans, and the Bisclaverets of the Bretons. Marie of France, in her *Lai du Bisclaveret* (*Poésies*, i. 178, ed. 1820) says: “It is quite certain and anciently often happened that men were transformed into were-wolves,

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Brit.* p. 229. May not this passage have been in the poet's mind when he compared Vivien to “an enemy that has left Death in the living waters” (*M. and V.* l. 145)?

<sup>2</sup> Blanford, *Mammalia of India*, p. 139, considers it doubtful how far the numerous Indian stories of wolf-suckled children are worthy of credence; but there are details of an indubitable case in the Journal of the *Anthropol. Soc. of Bombay*, vol. i. Such children were all idiots, and did not long survive their restoration to human society.

and had their dwelling in the forests. The were-wolf is a savage beast; so great is its fury that it devours men and does great mischief." Compare Malory, XIX. xi. In the story of the Volsungs, Sigmund and Sinfjötli become *skin-changers*, clothe themselves in wolf-skins (apparently to simulate were-wolves) and fiercely attack men for their wealth. (Vigfússon and Powell, *Corp. Poet. Boreale*, i. 425.)

In line 34, "King Leodegran groaned for the Romans back again," there is probably a reference to the famous "groans of the Britons" of Gildas, who says that the Britons wrote to the Roman senate that "the barbarians drive us into the sea; the sea throws us back on the barbarians; thus two modes of death await us, we are either slain or drowned." And in § 16 Gildas says that "the Roman legion had no sooner returned home in joy and triumph, than their former foes, like hungry and ravening wolves, rushing with greedy jaws upon the fold which is left without a shepherd," attacked the Britons.

In line 36 Tennyson has changed the name Rience (first edition) to Urien. In Geoffrey (p. 238) Urien is called the brother of Lot, and Malory describes him as the husband of Arthur's sister, Morgan le Fay. Rience is the King of North Wales, who, according to Malory (I. xv; cf. vi.), "made great war upon King Leodegrance of Cameliant." In the metrical *Romance of Merlin*, both King Rion—also (II. v.) called Ryance, King of Ireland—and King Urien are mentioned as

fighting against Leodegran. This Rience it was who wanted Arthur's beard to complete a mantle of kings' beards that he was making (*vide* Malory, I. xxiv.); compare the Welsh legend of Rhitta (*Mabin.* p. 283); Geoffrey's story of the giant Ritho (p. 254); Spenser's of Crudor (*F. Q.*, VI. i. 15); and the Ballad of King Ryence's challenge in Percy (*Rel.* ii. 121).

In line 73 Anton corresponds to the Sir Ector of Malory, and Sir Timon of Spenser; his name has been taken—slightly altered—from Antour, who takes charge of Arthur in the old *Romance of Merlin* (Ellis, *Six Rom.* p. 103). In line 221 we are told that Anton's wife reared the child Arthur.

The yearnings and hopes that Arthur felt, "desiring to be joined with Guinevere" (l. 76), are alluded to by Arthur in his last words to his fallen queen (*Gwin.* l. 481; cf. ll. 296-304).

The poet frequently describes himself (or Malory, as the case may be) as he "who tells the tale." This indirect mode of mentioning the narrator is taken from the old French romances, where it is commonly employed.

In line 96, hope of winning Guinevere exalts Arthur to such a degree that his eyesight becomes preternaturally acute. In *Pericles* (V. i.) Shakspeare similarly makes the hearing of Pericles become so intensified by joy that he can hear the music of the spheres.

Perhaps there may be an allusion in the text to Malory, XVII. xiii.—when Lancelot had heard certain

words, "he start up and saw great clearness (brightness) about him." Then he said, "I wot not in what joy I am, for this joy passeth all earthly joy that ever I was in."

The visibility of the morning-star in "high day," described in line 99, may be compared with the *Last Tournament*, line 347.

Perhaps the "lightnings and great thunders" over Arthur are a reminiscence of Geoffrey's description of the fight betwixt Hengist and Eldol: "the fire sparkled with the clashing of their arms, and every stroke in a manner produced thunder and lightning"; and compare Malory X. xxx.: "It seemed a flaming fire about them." The "dazing of all eyes" recalls Spenser's account of Arthur's shield, which was so dazzling that it had to be kept covered.<sup>1</sup>

The list of conquered kings in lines 112-115 is from Malory, I. vi. xiv. xv.; but in the romance it is Merlin, not Arthur, who stays the slaughter, saying to the king: "Thou hast never done: hast thou not done enough? . . . it is time to say Ho!"

"Ho!" (line 120) was the cry used by the heralds to stop fighting in battle or tourney. It is equivalent to the carter's exclamation *Whoa*, but seems sometimes to have been regarded as a form of *Hold*.

The description of Lancelot (line 124) as the warrior whom Arthur "loved and honoured most" is repeated in

<sup>1</sup> Spenser, *F. Q.*, V. viii. 38, imitating Atlante's shield that Ruggiero bore, in Ariosto, *Orl. Fur.*; Ariosto probably remembered the *egis* of Pallas Athene, as Atlante's shield paralysed all who saw it uncovered.

line 446 below; and the Arthurian maxim, "Man's word is God in man" (line 132), occurs again in *Balin and Balan*, line 8. It may be paraphrased: a man's promise is a divine thing, therefore it must be regarded as especially sacred.

In Malory X. xvii. (compare IV. xviii.) Lancelot and Tristram "were made friends and sworn brethren together," as here (l. 131) Arthur and Lancelot swear a deathless love.

The account of Merlin's master, Bleys, is from Malory (I. xv.): "And so Bleise wrote the battle, word for word, as Merlin told him, how it began, and by whom, and in likewise how it had ended, and who had the worse. All the battles that were done in Arthur's days Merlin did his master Bleise do write," etc.

In line 160 Leodegran says that if Arthur had only helped him in the battle as the chamberlain has helped him by his counsel, that is, not at all, he would not have been saved as he had been.

"The bright dishonour" (l. 194) means the guilty splendour of the King Uther's love.

With the accounts of Arthur's birth and accession compare the version given in *Guinevere*, ll. 282-293. There he is said to have been "by miracle approven King," which is an allusion to Malory's account of the sword that none save Arthur could draw from the stone in which it was set.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compare the sword that Sigmund draws, in the *Volsungasaga*; and Malory's account of Balin.

We are only told in the *Coming of Arthur* (l. 232) that Merlin, "thro' his craft," had him crowned, and the story of the miraculous sword is not given by Tennyson. The poet thus constantly eliminates supernatural and magical incidents from the narrative, in order to diminish as much as possible the incongruity arising from a commingling of grotesque mediæval sorcery with solemn Christian mysteries. For an instance of this, in line 346, Merlin's magic power of walking unseen is only suggested, not asserted: "Merlin, who, *they say*, can walk unseen."

Leodegran in line 247 says that a "doubtful throne" is like an iceberg that has drifted into southern latitudes, where it must soon topple over. Tristram also calls Arthur "a doubtful lord"—one whose title is not firmly established (*Tour*. l. 682).

The elaborate picture of the coronation scene has evidently a symbolical meaning. Thus the three queens are said by Mr. Elsdale<sup>1</sup> to denote Faith, Hope, and Charity; though probably the three virtues noted by Malory as deficient in the knights—Charity, Abstinence, and Truth—might be more appropriately signified (Mal. XVI. iv.) It is these three queens who receive Arthur into the ship of death when he passes away (*Passing*, l. 454).

In line 274, *Vert* and *Azure*, green and blue, are heraldic *tinctures* or colours, used in blazoning; Flame-colour may be used instead of *Gules*, red. These three

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in the Idylls*, p. 14.

rays shine through a window in which there is a stained-glass picture of the Crucifixion.

The Lady of the Lake is mystic and wonderful ; she seems to symbolise Religion, as is denoted by the sacred fish on her breast, and the great emblematic figure of her at the gate of Arthur's palace (*Gareth*, ll. 208-224).

Mr. Elsdale interprets Merlin as typifying "the powers of the intellect and imagination, of which the soul must make due use in its warfare"; and of the Lady of the Lake he says that, as symbolising Religion, "she 'knows a subtler' magic' than Merlin, inasmuch as the spiritual is higher and deeper than the purely intellectual" (p. 14). See some further remarks in the next chapter.

The samite in which she is clothed was originally a kind of rich silk, interwoven with gold or embroidered. The word is traced through the old French *samit* and the low Latin *samitum* and *examitum* to the late Greek ἑξ, six, and *μίτος*, a thread of the woof. The line, "Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful," is taken from the old portion of the *Passing of Arthur*, l. 197.

In Malory, I. xxiii., the gift of the sword Excalibur is described as follows: "And as they rode, Arthur said, I have no sword. No force, said Merlin, hereby is a sword that shall be yours and I may. So they rode till they came to a lake, the which was a fair water and a broad, and in the midst of the lake Arthur was



ware of an arm clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in that hand. Lo, said Merlin, yonder is that sword that I spake of. With that they saw a damsel going upon that lake. [Compare Tennyson's "hath power to walk the waters."] What is that? said Arthur. That is the Lady of the Lake, said Merlin." She tells Arthur to row over and take the sword, which he accordingly does. This differs from the version in the *Romance of Merlin*, where Excalibur is identical with the sword that Merlin set in the stone. In Malory these two swords are distinguished.

In line 484 the "voice as of the waters" is again mentioned, and in *Lanc. and Blain*, l. 1399, the Lady is described as "pacing on the dusky mere" while chaunting "snatches of mysterious hymns."

The jewelled hilt of the sword Excalibur is more fully described in the *Passing of Arthur*, ll. 224-226. Here "elfin Urim" denote magic jewels. The *Urim*, a Hebrew plural, meaning "flames," were some kind of sparkling ornaments worn anciently by the Jewish High Priest when giving oracular responses. The blade of Excalibur was "so bright in his enemies' eyes," says Malory, "that it gave light like thirty torches" (I. vii.; *Coming of Ar.* l. 299).

The inscription on the hilt is not given by Malory, but in Book II. chap. iii. he says that Excalibur means "cut steel."

In the *Romance of Merlin* the inscription on the sword reads :—

“Ich am yhote Escaliboure,  
Unto a kinge fair tresore.  
(On Englis is this writing,  
Kerve steel, and yron, and all thing.)”

In R. de Boron's poem Excalibur is said to be a *Hebrew* word (“the oldest tongue of all this world,” says Tennyson), and to mean in French *tranche-fer*, cut iron; on which Villemarqué notes that it is a Celtic word, but really possesses the signification given to it by the old romance-writer.<sup>1</sup>

Leodegran's ornithology is open to question when he says that “the swallow and the swift are near akin”; but he means that princes are like princes, and Arthur is prince-like; however, he adds, Bellicent, being herself Arthur's sister, can best solve the difficulty. By assuming the relationship between her and Arthur he tests its truth.

Bellicent doubts Arthur's natural kinship to herself, for she and all her race are dark-haired, while he is surpassingly fair, with *golden* hair. So in the *Passing of Arthur*, line 384,—his “light and lustrous curls, That made his forehead like a rising sun High from the dais-throne”; and in the *Last Tournament*, line 661,—“His hair, a sun that rayed from off a brow Like hill-snow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes, The golden beard that fringed his lips with light”;—features that recall Ænone's description of Paris's “sunny hair, clustered about his temples like a god's.” Such golden

<sup>1</sup> *Myrdhin*, p. 183; Ellis, *Metr. Rom.* p. 105.

hair was very uncommon among the Cymry; and Taliessin specially mentions Mael's hair for its golden hue; but Tennyson says that Mael, Lancelot, is black-haired.

When Bleys called Bellicent to his deathbed she noticed that he was "shrunk like a fairy changeling" (line 362).

We may here be allowed to quote a passage from a once popular book—Crofton Croker's *Fairy Legends of the South of Ireland*. At page 28 (ed. 1834) we read: "Now Mrs. Sullivan fancied that her youngest child had been changed by 'fairies' theft,' to use Spenser's words, and certainly appearances warranted such a conclusion; for in one night her healthy, blue-eyed boy had become shrivelled up into almost nothing, and never ceased squalling and crying. This naturally made poor Mrs. Sullivan very unhappy." Her friends tell her that it is a changeling. . . . "But she did not wish to hurt the thing; for although its face was so withered, and its body wasted away to a mere skeleton, it had still a strong resemblance to her own boy," etc.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Shak. *Mids. N. Dream*, II. i. 120; Spenser, *H. Q.*, I. x. 65:—

"From thence a Faery thee unwetting reft  
There as thou slepest in tender swaddling band,  
And her base elfin brood there for thee left;  
Such men do Changelings call, so changed by Faeries theft."

Villemarqué, *Barzaz Breiz*, p. 31, has a song in the dialect of Cornouailles, *L'enfant supposé*, which is remarkably like Croker's story; as is also Schillot's *L'enfant changé*, in *Contes des Paysans et Pêcheurs*, xv. p. 75.

When Merlin and Bleys go to the sea-shore on the night that Arthur comes from the great deep, it is on the *ninth wave* that he is borne to the feet of Merlin (l. 379). The Welsh bards allude frequently to this wave, which comes with more force than do the others. Thus, describing Gawain's tomb by the sea-shore they say :—

“The grave of Gwalchmai is in Piton,  
Where the ninth wave flows.”—*Mabin.* p. 60.

The popular Welsh tradition is that the waves are the sheep of the mermaid Gwenhwydwy, and the ninth wave is called her “ram,” as it is larger than the other “sheep” (Southey, *Madoc in Wales*, iv. 34 note).

When Bellicent questions Merlin on the subject of Bleys's story, he answers her in “riddling triplets of old time” (l. 401); that is, in the tercet rhymes in which many of the bardic poems, as well as the later Breton songs, are written. As a specimen of these triplets I may quote one from the Breton war-march of Arthur—a chant very different in spirit from Tennyson's “Let the King reign,” but more typical of the fierceness of “old time” :—

“Kalon am lagad ! penn am brec'h !  
Ha laz am blons, ha traon ha krec'h !  
Ha tad am map, ha mamm am merc'h !”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translated : a heart for an eye, a head for an arm ; death for a wound, in the valley as on the mountain ; and a father for a mother, and a mother for a daughter. See *Barzaz Breiz*, p. 50. And at p. 10, M. de Villemarqué, speaking of the Druids, says that Diogenes Laertius (*Praemia*, p. 5, liv. c. sect. 6) “nous prouve en outre, par

Of Merlin's triplets here the meaning seems to be: Shadow and light, and the rainbow of aspiration! Arthur will know more hereafter than to hope for impossibilities; Bleys may have been raving (Merlin may come to mischance despite all his wisdom). The form of Truth varies in dependence on the percipient mind; it may have a spiritual significance to me (like a rainbow in the sky), and only an earthly radiance to thee (like a rainbow on the dewy grass): whether open or hidden, let Truth prevail. The years pass by, summer comes again. Life is a mystery, out of the deep and back to the deep once more.

With the line "From the great deep to the great deep he goes," compare line 382 above—Arthur coming from the unknown ocean; also *Gareth*, ll. 482-492; *Last Tournament*, ll. 132 and 680; *Passing of Arthur*, l. 445; and the poem called *De Profundis*.

The belief that Arthur will come again is prevalent still among the country-folk of Brittany; and in Cornwall it is supposed that his spirit now dwells in a raven or else a chough. The mediæval notion was that, like Charlemagne, Barbarossa, Tell, Harold, and other heroes, he is sleeping the sleep in a cavern—

une citation, que leur rythme privilégié était le tercet, ou strophe de trois vers monorimes. Le chant armoricain offre donc, quant au fond et quant à la forme, les caractères généraux des leçons des Druides; on y retrouve les principales données de leur enseignement, il présente la même méthode technique, à savoir le dialogue et le tercet, et les énigmes ne manquent pas; essayons de les diviner." A friend has kindly tried, but unsuccessfully, to find the "citation" in Diog. Laert. for me.

in Craig y Dinas, some say—amid his knights in full armour, waiting for the time when he shall come again. Malory's account is that "some men yet say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu in another place. And men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb the verse, *Hic jacet Arthurus, Rex quondam Rexque futurus*" (XXI. vii.)

In the vision of Leodegran, the words "the hind fell, the herd was driven," mean that the rustics were slain and their cattle *reived*, driven off by plundering bands (l. 413).

Lancelot does not appear in Malory until the sixth book of the story, but Tennyson brings him on the scene from the first, when on the field of death he swears a deathless love to Arthur. This incident is not in the first edition (1870) of the *Coming of Arthur*, but its introduction shows that the poet wishes to intensify the ties between the two and thereby emphasise the enormity of the breach of faith that Lancelot becomes guilty of. The embassy of Lancelot to bring Guinevere to Arthur should be compared with the early *Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere*, and the passages in which the matter is alluded to in *Balin*, line 267, and *Vivien*, line 132.

Tennyson has been found fault with (by Mr. R. Noel, *Essays*, p. 244) for having made them fall in love in this way, as he to a certain extent provides some excuse for them; but surely an excuse is precisely what is needed, to reduce if possible the flagrancy of their great sin. After all, Lancelot is the noblest of the knights, and Guinevere is a peerless lady; if they sin, it must not be coarsely and brutally, but as yielding perforce to a supreme temptation. The grace that veils their sin does not in the least detract from its heinousness; on the contrary, "lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds." Tennyson's *Life and Duty* gives us his judgment on the moral problem involved in their fall.

Dubric the high saint (l. 452), the archbishop of Legions (Caerleon), "primate of Britain, and legate of the apostolical see, was," says Geoffrey, "so eminent for his piety that he could cure any sick person by his prayers" (*Hist. Brit.* p. 243). Malory only states that "the King was wedded at Camelot unto Dame Guenevre in the church of St. Stephen's, with great solemnity" (III. v.)

Outside the church "great lords from Rome" stood—ambassadors who had come to demand the ancient tribute.

Malory's description is ultimately derived from Geoffrey's, which is as follows: "Twelve men of an advanced age, and venerable aspect, and bearing olive branches in their right hands, for a token that they were come upon an embassy" (*Hist. Brit.* p. 246).

The battle-chant of Arthur's knighthood is composed in stiff and abrupt rhythm that gives the lines a sort of warlike clang in unison with the sounding trumpets, but the pæan, unaccompanied by music, seems to tell "a tale of little meaning though the words are strong." It is not in the first edition of the *Coming of Arthur* (1870).

In the curt answer to the Roman envoys, and the words "Arthur strove with Rome," the poet in a few lines disposes of an amount of pseudo-history that occupies nearly half of Geoffrey's entire narrative. But even Tennyson's brief allusion to Arthur's Roman war has no foundation in history. The Britons were too weak to "drive the heathen," the Picts and Scots, from the Roman wall themselves, and hence they called in the Saxons to help them after the Romans had finally declined to afford further aid. This tribute even is a myth. Milton demolishes the legend that Arthur strove with Rome (*Hist. Eng.* iii.) Arthur's twelve great battles have been mentioned previously, chap. iii.; see too *Elaine*, l. 286, and *Passing*, l. 69.



## CHAPTER VI

### GARETH AND LYNETTE

THIS Idyll introduces Gareth, as yet untried in arms, but dreaming day and night of deeds of prowess. He is the youngest son of King Lot and Queen Bellicent, and his mother wishes to keep him at her side lest he should meet with harm. But he is now a young man, and will remain inactive no longer. He resolves to go to Arthur's court and seek for knighthood there. Bellicent, in her desire to detain him, imposes, as the price of her consent to his departure, the condition that he will first serve for a year as one of Arthur's kitchen servants. Gareth, however, accepts this condition, and soon after departs secretly with only two followers. The three are disguised as rustics, and they first come in sight of the spires and roofs of Camelot glancing and disappearing amid the eerie mists of morning. The three are pausing before the wondrous city-gates, when old Merlin comes forth and asks them who they are. Gareth replies that they are rustics, and requests the old man to explain truly to them the mysteries of the weird city and of the king.

Merlin sees through the pretended rustic's disguise, and answers him half in mockery, saying that the city and everything in it, except the king, is illusory and not what it seems. This reply angers Gareth, but the sage points out that Gareth has begun by representing himself falsely. Merlin departs; Gareth enters the city, and ascends to the king's hall, where Arthur is seated on his throne, dealing justice to all comers.

First, a widow claims a field that Uther had taken from her husband. Arthur orders it to be restored with treble interest. Then another widow comes forward. She rails upon Arthur as her enemy, but demands his help in redressing the wrongs that a kinsman has done to her. Sir Kay interposes, and asks Arthur to punish her for her bitter words, but the king reproves him, and sends a knight to do battle for her. Next, an envoy from Mark, King of Cornwall, comes bearing a costly cloth of gold as a gift for Arthur. He prefers Mark's request that Arthur will knight him as he has knighted Tristram. But Arthur rejects the gift and the request with scorn; Mark is not fit to rank among churls, let alone knights: a felon wretch, who strikes secretly.

Many other suppliants come and obtain justice, and lastly Gareth advances, supported between his two men, as though too weak to stand without assistance.

Up to this point the Idyll is not indebted to Malory in any direct manner, and the first four hundred lines

may be considered as of original design, although their germ is to be traced perhaps in the story of Peredur in the *Mabinogion*.

From line 430 onward the Idyll and the *Morte Darthur* must be read side by side.

The story is told in the seventh book of Malory's romance, which Tennyson has considerably abridged and altered. The first twenty-one chapters should be studied in particular for comparison.

In the Idyll, as we have seen, it is Bellicent who proposes the condition that Gareth shall serve for a year as a kitchen knave.

This provides a more rational motive—although still a strange one—for such a proceeding than we find in Malory's narrative, in which Gareth declares that he has himself undertaken this menial drudgery in order that he may prove and assay his friends (VII. xi.)

Gareth's encounter with Lancelot comes last in Tennyson, first in Malory (VII. iv.)

In the Idyll, Arthur has been secretly told by Bellicent that the kitchen knave is her ambitious son, and Arthur himself gives him knighthood. In Malory it is Lancelot who dubs him, and Gareth is only made known to Arthur after his quest is ended (see VII. xxiii.)

For a description of Linet, whom men call "the damoyssel saveage," see chapter xxxiii.; and chapters xxxiv. and xxxv. for the marriage of Gareth, not, as in Tennyson, to Lynette, but to Dame Liones (Lyonors), whom he had come to rescue.

Although Tennyson's Lynette reviles Gareth for a time, she does it through indignation at the affront that she supposes Arthur to have put upon herself and her sister by his sending a kitchen knave to be their champion. She is not really a "damoyseel savage," but an independent and high-spirited girl, with some sharpness of tongue and some pride, though of a subduable sort. No doubt she becomes a good wife to the hero of this Tennysonian *Taming of the Shrew*, but we are not given any glimpse of their after-history.

In the first line Gareth is called the last tall son of Lot and Bellicent. Their other sons were Gawain, Agravaine, Gaheris, and Modred, but only Gawain and Modred figure in the *Idylls*.

The scene opens presumably near Lot's home in Orkney, and hence there is a special fitness in the use of the Gaelic word *spate*, in line 3, to describe the river in flood-time.

I have said that Tennyson perhaps found a suggestion of the interview between young Gareth and his mother in the opening passages of the story of Peredur in the *Mabinogion*. An extract will show how far there is any ground for this hypothesis.

"Now the name of his seventh son was Peredur, and he was the youngest of them. And he was not of an age to go to wars and encounters, otherwise he might have been slain as well as his father and brothers. His mother was a scheming and thoughtful woman, and she

was very solicitous concerning this her only son and his possessions. So she took counsel with herself to leave the inhabited country, and to flee to the deserts and unfrequented wildernesses. And she permitted none to bear her company thither but women, and boys, and spiritless men, who were both unaccustomed and unequal to war and fighting. And none dared to bring horses or arms where her son was, lest he should set his mind upon them. And the youth went daily to divert himself in the forest, by flinging sticks and staves" (*Mab.* p. 81). One day Peredur saw some knights, and he resolved to become a knight. His mother swooned at the thought. He selected a horse, and made a rough saddle. "And when Peredur came again to his mother, the countess had recovered from her swoon. 'My son,' said she, 'desirest thou to ride forth?'—'Yes, with thy leave,' said he. 'Wait then, that I may counsel thee before thou goest.'—'Willingly,' he answered, 'speak quickly.'" (p. 83). Peredur rides into Arthur's hall, and Kay, interfering as in the Gareth Idyll he does when the widow claims redress, comes forward and strikes a dwarf and "dwarfess" who salute Peredur. But Peredur goes forth and slays a knight who had insulted Guinevere. There are a few minor resemblances. Peredur and Gareth are alike simple-minded and childish at first, and both, though so young, begin by quarrelling with Kay and by overcoming knights of prowess. The Thornton romance makes Percival's mother Ache flour the sister of Arthur, as Queen Bellicent is also. These

coincidences are not very close, no doubt; still it seems possible that the germ of the poet's picture of young Gareth may be found in Peredur.

In line 18, "Heaven yield her for it," we have an Elizabethan expression, as in Shakspeare's "the gods yield you for it" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV. ii. 33), that is, reward, or bless you. The primitive meaning of *yield* is "repay," thence comes our sense of "give up."

The story of the goose and golden eggs, in line 40, may be compared with Tennyson's early humorous poem of "The Goose."

Gareth's two apologues figure his own ambitions, restrained by his mother's apprehensive love.

The old manuscript books of prayers recited at fixed hours (Books of Hours) often had beautifully-illuminated margins, on which scrolls, figures of saints and angels, palm-trees, and emblematic devices were blazoned in gold and colours. Gareth refers to such a book in line 46.

The account of King Lot in lines 73-80 is not from Malory, who says that Lot was slain in battle by Pellinore.

"Red berries *charm* the bird," says Bellicent, that is, lure the bird into the snare. So Mrs. Hardcastle says of her precious Tony: "he would charm the bird from the tree." The saying is proverbial.

The Vicar of Wakefield's allegory of Guilt and Shame (chap. xv.) is superior to Gareth's rather forced parable of Fame and Shame. To say that Shame cleaved

to some, but they died of her, is more intelligible in a metaphorical than it is in a literal sense.

Gareth offers even to walk through fire (l. 131), and Bellicent asks him (l. 140), "Will ye walk through fire?" implying that she will give him an ordeal that will try his resolve. Accordingly she imposes on him the hard condition of "villain kitchen-vassalage" (l. 157), which to her proud son will be indeed an ordeal. The words "villain" and "villainy" (see *Pelleas*, l. 269) in feudal times denoted anything base, dishonourable, and unknighly.

Gareth answers that "the thrall in person may be free in soul,"—almost the same words that Arthegall uses in the *Faerie Queene* (V. v. 46): "His body was her thrall, his heart was freely placed." But the idea is a commonplace, and is perhaps best rendered in Lovelace's *To Althea: from Prison*, and in *Loyalty Confined*, an old ballad in Percy's *Reliques*, ii. 43.

In line 185 Tennyson substitutes Camelot for Malory's Caerleon, as the hall of Arthur has to be described.

Gareth's answer to his followers (line 205), that he has glamour—magic power—enough to plunge old Merlin into the Arabian Sea, may allude to the mediæval notion that plunging a magician into certain seas destroyed his sorceries: the Red Sea especially had this property, it was said.

The great caryatid statue of the Lady of the Lake, supporting the gateway with arms outspread "like the

Cross," has been already alluded to as symbolising Religion. But, in fact, this mystic and wonderful being is a mere lay-figure in the story. The elaboration of emblematic detail makes her ornate rather than sublime or awe-inspiring; she has none of the weird grandeur, the mystic vagueness, of Milton's "Great Vision of the guarded Mount"; nor, on the other hand, does she exert any such real influence upon the characters of the narrative, as a distinct personification of Religion itself would be expected to do. She is not even once alluded to in the central religious and mystical Idyll of the Grail, and it is plain that the poet has realised the practical impossibility of combining the sacred emblems of early Christianity—the Sword of Divine Justice (or of the Spirit), the incense of Holiness, the fish-symbol<sup>1</sup> of Christ, the living waters, the Lake, perhaps of Galilee—into one consistent figure, identical with and yet widely differing from the great guardian Fay of mediæval demonology.

The guardian angels of kingdoms are machines too ponderous for even greater poets than Blackmore to manage quite successfully!

The devices, so "inveterately mingled" (l. 223), call to mind Wordsworth's *Yew Trees*—

"A growth  
Of intertwined fibres serpentine,  
Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved."

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<sup>1</sup> On the fish-emblem, ΙΧΘΥΣ, the mystic five initials of Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτὴρ, see King, *The Gnostics*, p. 138.



The "dragon-boughts" are coiled tails of dragons "in knots and many boughtes upwound, Pointed with mortall sting" (*P. Q.*, I. i. 15). Milton's "many a winding bout" is the same word (*L'Allegro*).

Mr. Elsdale's ingenious interpretation of the seer's half-mocking, half-encouraging speech to Gareth (ll. 248-274) may be quoted: "The fairy king and fairy queens who come from a sacred mountain *cleft* towards the sunrise [*i.e.* Parnassus], to build the city, are the old mythologies whose birthplace was in the East, the land of the rising sun. From them, besides the religions of the ancient world, are derived poetry, architecture, sculpture; all those elevating and refining arts and sciences which were called into existence mainly and primarily as the expression and embodiment of religious feeling. These, with all that whole circle of unnumbered influences, mental, moral, or religious, derived from the experiences of the past, with which they are associated, constitute the city in which the soul dwells, —the sphere in which it works, and the surrounding atmosphere in which it breathes. . . . The city is built to music; for as the harmony and proportion of sound constitute music, so the harmony and proportion of all the various elements and powers which go to make up the man will constitute a fitting shrine for the ideal soul. 'Therefore never built at all'; for the process of assimilating and working up into one harmonious whole all the various external elements is continually going on and unending. 'Therefore built

for ever ' ; for since harmonious and proportionate development is the continual law, the city will always be complete and at unity with itself" (*Studies in the Idylls*, p. 24).

The city in another sense may represent the state of spiritual and moral culture in the world during any epoch. Every generation has to build its own spiritual city for itself—the music has to be kept up by those who come next—and so on : therefore it has continuity, for men are ever building ; yet it is not a permanent structure, but depends on the renewed efforts of generation after generation.

Merlin in line 248 alludes to the curious mirage of the Fata Morgana, sometimes visible on the sea-coast, especially, it is said, off the coast of Calabria in Italy, where the natives say that it is the work of the Fairy Morgana (the Morgan le Fay of Arthurian romance). Dunlop says : " Every object at Reggio is then a thousand times reflected in a marine mirror, or, when vapours are thick, on a species of aerial screen, elevated above the surface of the water, on which the groves and hills and towers are represented as in a moving picture" (*History of Fiction*, p. 81). Ships may sometimes be seen reflected upside down on the sky, even when the ships themselves are out of sight beyond the horizon.

The walls of Camelot were built, Merlin adds, to the music of fairy harps. Thus the walls of Thebes were anciently believed to have arisen (see Tennyson's

*Amphion*, and Wordsworth's *On the Power of Sound*) ; and CEnone says that the walls of Troy "Rose slowly to a music slowly breathed."

Gareth's reply to Merlin (whom he cannot understand) recalls Spenser's

"Old syre, it seemes thou hast not red  
How ill it sits with that same silver hed  
In vaine to mocke, or mockt in vaine to bee ;  
But if thou be, as thou art pourtrahed  
With Nature's pen, in age's grave degree,  
Aread in graver wise what I demaund of thee."

*F. Q.*, I. viii. 33.

But the seer gives an oracular response, resembling somewhat the mystical passages in Taliessin, and the metaphysical Triads of Bardism. He hints not only at Gareth's disguise and perplexity, but at the illusion of Arthur and the violations of vows that will ensue—"for there is nothing in it as it seems, saving the king."

Gareth's grammar becomes a little confused. "Let love be blamed for it, not *she* or *I*," if expanded, must read—Let not *she* be blamed, let not *I* be blamed, where *her* and *me* would be more in accordance with ordinary usage.

These works that Mage Merlin wrought for Arthur recall the four great fountains (mentioned by Ariosto and Tasso) that he made in France, and covered with wondrous carvings.

Passing on to line 360, Sir Kay, the Thersites of the

Romance-writers,<sup>1</sup> asks that the railing woman be given the boon of gyve and gag. In old times scolding women were sometimes tied in a chair called the cucking-stool, and an iron muzzle (called a Branks or Gossip's bridle) was fastened on their heads. Apparently this is the remedy that Kay prescribes in the present instance.

In line 367 Emrys is the Celtic form of the Latin Ambrosius; thus Merlin was called in Celtic Marthin Emrys.

Tristram is called Mark's cousin in line 386. The word cousin seems to be here used, as in Malory and our older writers generally, in the sense of kinsman. Kings still frequently describe noblemen as their cousins, although unrelated by blood. We know from Malory that Tristram was the son of Mark's sister.

The next line, 387, may be paraphrased: And since Mark was of higher rank than Tristram, he had a greater claim to the "large honour" of knighthood.

The rending of the golden cloth recalls a passage in the *Princess*, where the king tears "a wonder of the loom" that has been sent him by another king.

The character of Mark may be traced in the following extracts from Malory. Lamorak says: "I had liever strife and debate fell in Mark's court rather than Arthur's, for the honour of both courts be not alike" (VIII. xxxix.) Again (IX. xxxix.), "Sir Gaheris said he would be advised, for King Mark was ever full of

<sup>1</sup> Kai, "le Thersite des Romanciers," says Roquefort, *Marie de France, Poésies*, ii. 201.

treason." Sir Dinadan rescued Sir Berluse, "for King Mark was but a murderer" (X. x.) Mark says to Dinadan: "When ye come to Arthur's court, discover not my name, for I am there so hated" (X. xi.) Mark was "a fair speaker, and false thereunder" (X. xv.) He made fair promises, swearing upon the Bible, "but for all this King Mark thought falsely" (X. xxii.) "But Sir Launcelot bad ever Sir Tristram beware of King Mark, for ever he called him in his letters King Fox, as who saith, He fareth all with wiles and treason" (X. xxvi.)

Arthur threatens to "lap him up in cloth of lead" (l. 422), in allusion to the old custom of using sheet lead for winding round corpses. So in Shakspeare's *Sonnets to Sundry Notes*, "All thy friends are lapt in lead." And in Malory, XXI. xi, we are told that when Guenever was dead she was "wrapped in cered cloth of Raines, from the top to the toe in thirty fold, and after she was put in a web of lead, and then in a coffin of marble."

The pronoun "thine" at the end of line 442 refers to "master": Kay, who is master of the meats and drinks, must be thy master then.

Kay's speech, and indeed much of this scene, is very closely from Malory. "Then the king betook him [assigned him] to Sir Kay, the steward, and charged him that he should give him meat and drinks of the best, and also that he had all manner of finding as though he was a lord's son. That shall little need,

said Sir Kay, to do such cost upon him; for I dare undertake he is a villain born, and never will make man, for and he had come of gentlemen he would have asked of you horse and armour, but such as he is, so he asketh. And since he hath no name, I shall give him a name that shall be Beaumains, that is Fair Hands, and into the kitchen I shall bring him, and there he shall have fat browis every day, that he shall be as fat by the twelvemonth's end as a pork hog" (VII. i.)

Gawain and Lancelot are both wroth at Kay, and bid him leave his mocking, and Lancelot after meat bade Gareth "come to his chamber, and there he should have meat and drink enough."

Tennyson leads up more adroitly to the giving of the nickname Beaumains, Fair Hands, by making Kay take up Lancelot's words: "hands large, fair and fine."

The enumeration of particulars in this description of "a man" rather resembles Shakspeare's description of the points of a horse.

Lancelot sees that, despite his disguise, Gareth is a gentleman born, and concludes that his asking such menial service is due to some boyish freak or romantic affair.

Kay's reply, "Think ye this fellow will poison the king's dish," has a deeper meaning than appears on the surface, for King Aurelius had been poisoned in this manner (Geoffrey).

Kay taunts Lancelot with his own "finess" (line 466), his fantastic courtesy; as again in line 715:

"ye are overfine To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies." In *Merlin and Vivien*, line 794, "over-fineness" denotes devotion to an ideal above the common comprehension. In line 1317 below, the "skill and fineness" that Lancelot shows Gareth means adroitness and *finesse*.

In line 490 we are told yet another version of the *Coming of Arthur*—

"How once the wandering forester at dawn,  
Far over the blue turns and hazy seas,  
On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,  
A naked babe."

Caer-Eryri literally means in Welsh, Snowdon Field, from *Cae*, field; *r*, euphonic; and *Eryri*, Snowdon.

Arthur "cannot die" (line 492), but passes to the Island Valley of Avilion, described in the *Passing of Arthur*, ll. 427-432. There, like Endymion in Latmos, he shall sleep the sleep.

This Avilion or Avalon—the "Isle of Apples"—supposed in later times to have been at Glastonbury, was the Paradise of the Celts.

Mr. Baring Gould (*Curious Myths*, "The Fortunate Isles") has traced the myth through its various forms in classical and mediæval legend. Tennyson pictures the scene in the *Palace of Art*:—

"Mythic Uther's deeply-wounded son  
In some fair space of sloping greens  
Lay, dozing in the vale of Avalon,  
And watch'd by weeping queens."

Gareth, we are told, "by two yards in casting bar and stone Was counted best" (line 508) in any "trial of mastery." Compare Malory's "and where were any maistries done thereat would he be, and there might none cast bar or stone to him by two yards" (VII. ii.)

In the *Morte Darthur* he serves his full year, but Tennyson makes Bellicent loose him from the condition during the second month.

When he hears from an old playfellow the news of his release, "shame never made girl redder" than joy made Gareth.

He leaps at once from Satan's foot—the depths of despair and torment—to Peter's knee—the portal of Heaven, where St. Peter sits as door-keeper.

What follows—"Here the king's calm eye," line 536—differs from Malory, who gives no hint that Arthur has known Gareth all along to be his nephew. Malory makes Beaumains ask two boons,—“First, that ye grant me this adventure of the damsel, for it belongeth to me. Thou shalt have it, said the king; I grant it to thee. Then, sir, this is the other gift, that ye shall bid Launcelot du Lake make me knight, for of him I will be made knight, and else of none. And when I am past, I pray you let him ride after me, and make me knight when I require him.” This knighthood is soon required and granted, after Gareth and Launcelot have fought without either gaining the advantage (chaps. iv. v.)

The "best blood that it is sin to spill" on the pure



white altar-cloth (line 586) is the sacramental wine—"the chalice of the grapes of God."

Compare Tennyson's account of Lynette and her mistress with Malory's second chapter, where Arthur refuses to grant her a knight's service, as she will tell neither the name nor the dwelling-place of her mistress. The damsel is about to speak further, when the kitchen knave claims the adventure, and she indignantly leaves the court.

Instead of Liones (in Caxton, Lyonesse), as Lynette's sister is named by Malory, Tennyson, perhaps to avoid confusion with the name of the region of Lyonesse, takes the name Lyonors (so in Caxton, p. 62; Strachey spells it Lionors) from Malory I. xv., where it belongs to a lady upon whom Arthur "set great love," and she bare him a child. Perhaps this may be one reason why Tennyson makes Gareth wed not Lyonors but Lynette.

The old romances contain many such names as Castle Perilous (line 596). Thus in the *Morte Darthur* we find the Forest Perilous (IX. xvi.), the Chapel Perilous (VI. xiv.), the Perilous Lake (IX. xxxix.), the Siege Perilous (III. iv.), and this Castle Perilous, near the Isle of Avilion (VII. xxvi.) Similarly we have the Dolorous Stroke (II. xi.), the Dolorous Tower (VII. xxviii.), and the Dolorous Gard (VIII. x.)

In line 607 "wed a holy life" means become a nun, the Bride of Christ.

Tennyson's Lynette gives an account of the four knights that have to be overcome before Lyonors can

be released, and the poet takes occasion (line 614) to intimate that Arthur's chivalry are not to be confounded with "that old knight-errantry who ride abroad and do but what they will,"—such men as Cervantes has justly ridiculed.

In line 636 "topple over" is used (as in *M. of Geraint*, l. 491, and *G. and Enid*, l. 833) in the sense of overthrow. In the *Wellington Ode* the laureate speaks of scaling "the toppling crags of duty," where "toppling" means "overhanging," "beetling." For this latter sense of the word compare Shelley, *Hellas*, l. 960, "some toppling promontory proud," and *Euganean Hills*, "Save where many a palace gate . . . Topples o'er the abandoned sea." Shelley in a letter also describes "walls of toppling rocks, only to be scaled . . . by the winged chariot of the Ocean nymphs" (Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, ii. 190). Grainger, *Ode to Solitude*, uses "nodding" = toppling, in: "Whether by nodding towers you tread."

Tennyson has repeated the description of the "jewelled harness" of beetles (line 673) in his recent dramatic sketch, *The Foresters*, p. 79: "Beetles' jewel armour."

The "May-white" of the damsel's forehead (line 642) may be compared with Longfellow's maiden of the *Hesperus*: "Her bosom white as the hawthorn buds that ope in the month of May."

Some verbal notes may be briefly added here:—"the king hath past his time" (l. 693)—is in his dotage, become imbecile. *Counter*, line 657, opposite, Lat.

*contra*. *Agarie*, line 729, fungus, in the *holt*, wood. So in *Elwin Morris*, "names of agarie, moss, and fern." In line 731 there is a reference to the fact that some species of shrews and weasels emit a pungent odour at times.

The damsel's repudiation of her champion, lines 732-752, should be compared with Malory's fifth chapter (Bk. VII.), and Gareth's reply to Kay, line 736, with "I know you for an ungentle knight of the court, and therefore beware of me" (VII. iv.)

The comparison between the pool gleaming red in the twilight, and the eye of an eagle-owl, burning round and bright in the darkness, may have the fault of being too uncommon to really illustrate the description, but it is a simile that an ornithologist can appreciate. Indeed, a book might be written on the bird-lore of Tennyson, as has been well done by Mr. Harting in the case of Shakspeare.

"Caitiff" (in line 799), recreant, villain, felon, are all epithets of false knights.

The expression "wan water" may be from Malory's "waves wan" (XXI. v.), if "wan" be (as I suppose) an adjective in that passage; or from the metrical *Morte Darthur*, "waters deep and waves wan" (Ellis, *Metr. R.* p. 182); compare "wan wave" in the *Pussing of Ar.* l. 129.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Caxton's edition, page 849, ed. Sommer, Bedivere says to the king, "I sawe no thyng but the waters wappe and the wawes wanne"; and Dr. Sommer (Glossary, vol. ii.) explains "wappe, to wap, to lap, *inf.* (probably from the sound of the sea)," and "wanne, to wane,

"Grimly," line 806, is an adjective used by Scott : "so grimly and so ghastr" (*Marmion*).

In "good now," line 807, "good" is probably used as a form of address, "my good sir, now," as in *Hamlet*, "good now, sit down and tell me" (I. i. 70); so in *Troilus*, III. i. 122; *Errors*, IV. iv. 22.

"You be of Arthur's table," line 815, leads to such a play upon words as Tennyson is rather partial to: yes, he belongs to Arthur's table, being indeed his table-servant. Geraint's quips about the sparrow-hawk and Tristram's about the broken music, make words "of two colours" in the same way: but such *facetiae* are hardly as sparkling as the gem of fifty *facets* to which they are likened in *Geraint and Enid*, line 295.

The "peacock in his pride," line 829, is apparently a reminiscence of a passage in Stanley's delightful *History of Birds*, p. 281: "At table, peacocks were never introduced, except on the most important and magnificent occasions; and he who carved them was considered as honoured in the highest degree. The

grow less, to ebb, *inf.* A.S. *wanian*." This, I feel certain, is wrong. *Wane* would not be spelt *wanne* in the infinitive, and *wappe* is an old adjective meaning tremulous, whence our word *wobble*. With the frequentative adjectival suffix -r, -or, -er, we get the Elizabethan form *wopper* or *wapper*, like slipper (=slippery, *Par. Dainty Devices*, pp. 28, 59, 63, ed. 1810), lither (=lithie, Hazlitt's *Dodsley*, O. P. vii. 418), etc. *Wan water* is a common expression, and Tennyson uses it here; so in the death-scene of Arthur, Bedivere means: I saw the tremulous water and the pale waves. For the verbal derivative of "wap," which is also "wapper," see Shakspeare, *Timon*, IV. iii. 216; *Two Noble Kinsmen*, V. iv. 10; and for the adjectival, Cleveland, *Works*, ed. 1726, p. 226: "wopper eyes," of the tremulous eyes of an old man.

feathers from the tail of the peacock were formed by the ladies of quality into a crown, for the purpose of decorating their favourite troubadours or minstrels. The eyes were considered to represent the attention of the whole world as fixed upon them. And in those days of chivalry, so constantly was the peacock the object of the solemn vows of the knights, that its image was hung up in the place where they exercised themselves in the management of their horses and weapons; and before it, when roasted and dressed in its plumage, and placed with great pomp and ceremony, as the top dish, at the most splendid feasts, all the guests, male and female, took a solemn vow: the knights vowing bravery, and the ladies engaging to be loving and faithful."

Thus we see that Tennyson does not introduce this dainty dish without a purpose: Lynette is to be reminded by the peacock in his pride that ladies should be loving and gentle to their champions—a lesson she stands rather in need of.<sup>1</sup>

"Frontless," in line 839, means unabashed, shameless, with no front of shame, no blush.

Line 844, "a villain fitter to stick swine," is from Malory: "Fie, fie, said she, Sir Knight, ye are uncourteous to set a kitchen page before me, him be seemeth better to stick a swine than to sit afore a damsel of high parentage." This use of *stick* in the

<sup>1</sup> MacLise's picture, "The Chivalric Vow of the Ladies and the Peacock," represents an ancient scene of the sort described above.

sense of slaughter may have given rise to the Anglo-Indian sporting term "pig-sticking."

Lion and stoat have isled together in time of flood, line 871, for it is a well-known fact that wild animals, under the influence of terror of either water or fire, will take refuge on the same place and not molest one another. There are some famous pictures of the Deluge that illustrate such occurrences. Malory makes Sir Dinadan, in IX. xl., say, "And a wolf and a sheep were together in prison, the wolf would suffer the sheep to be in peace."

Gareth compares himself to Cinderella in line 882: he too has "lain among the ashes," and yet he hopes for as good fortune as Cinderella had. The story of Cinderella is found in almost every European country; see Mr. Ralston's paper in the *Nineteenth Century* for November 1879.

Before meeting the Knight of the Morning Star, otherwise Sir Percard the Knight of the Black Lawn, Malory tells us that Gareth, in addition to rescuing the knight from the six thieves, fought and slew two knights at a ford (passage). Some of the damsel's speech on this occasion may be quoted: "Thou weenest thou hast done doughtily; that is not so, for the first knight his horse stumbled, and there he was drowned in the water, and never it was by thy force nor thy might." Tennyson transfers this to Lynette's reply after the "Sun" is washed away, line 1030.

It is time to look into the allegory a little. "The

serpent river," says Mr. Elsdale, "is the stream of time. Its three long loops the three ages of life—youth, middle age, old age. The guardians of the crossings are the personified forms of the temptations suited to these different ages" (p. 27). The student with this clue should be able to work out the details of the allegory easily enough for himself.

The Daffodil, a bright yellow flower, is called the Lent Lily, as it blossoms about the season of Lent, and "takes the winds of March with beauty" (*Winter's Tale*); compare a "daffodil sky," in *Maud*.

The stone Avanturine, line 908, is a kind of quartz with glittering spangles of mica in it (Ogilvy). We should compare Gareth's reply in lines 921-927 with Malory's "Damsel, said Beaumains, a knight may little do that may not suffer a damsel; for whatsoever ye said unto me I took none heed to your words, for the more ye said the more ye angered me, and my wrath I wreaked upon them that I had ado withal."

Line 936, "Dog, thou liest! I spring from loftier lineage than thine own," is from chapter vii.: "Thou liest, said Beaumains, I am a gentleman born, and of more high lineage than thou, and that will I prove on thy body."

His words in line 957, "Damsel, thy charge is an abounding pleasure to me," recall chapter viii.: "Damsel, said Beaumains, your charge is to me a pleasure, and at your commandment his life shall be saved, and else not."

Lynette has now seen that he is a gentleman and no knave, and admiration of his valour awakens a different feeling in her heart. Her songs conceal rather than reveal this dawning love: maiden modesty will not permit her to abate one jot of her missayings and revilings.

Her first song indicates the sudden light that has dawned upon her: her morning dream has once proved true, that her love would smile on her that day.<sup>1</sup>

She counsels Gareth to take counsel, but ends with seeming scorn: "Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave." However, she answers him reasonably when he remonstrates with her.

After the Sun is overthrown, her love has smiled on her twice: her dream that she would find a victorious champion that day—a knight who would achieve her quest and become her love—has been twice proved true. Her revilings take a more mocking but less bitter tone. What does he know of flowers, save as garnitures of dishes; or of birds, save when turning on the spit! But there is no trace of scorn of Gareth in her proud reply to Sir Evening Star:—

"No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven  
With all disaster unto thine and thee!  
For both thy younger brethren have gone down  
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;  
Art thou not old?"

---

<sup>1</sup> "Answer me first; had you no morning dream, Demosthenes, a few hours ago; which dreams (they tell us) are sure to be accomplished, or show us things that are already so."—LANDOR, *Imag. Conv.* i. 357.



There is no scorn of him likewise in her vociferated encouragements: "I have prophesied . . . thou art worthy of the Table Round!" Nor in her half-hint—to nerve his arm with hopes of love—"the wind will never change again."

Thrice hath her dream come true—or rather three omens have now proved her dream true—her dream of a victorious and loving champion.

She asks pardon of Gareth in words that show the directness and sincerity of her character no less plainly than her revilings did before—she is a high-spirited girl and has imagined that the king had meant to put scorn upon her by sending his kitchen knave as her champion.

And now her wit is mazed—she knows not what to think.

Gareth answers her as a gentleman should. She still deems that he has yet to receive knighthood although she has no longer doubt that he will obtain the honour—as her "Sir Knave, my knight" implies.

When the spear of Lancelot overthrows him she is confused with doubts again. Gareth's laughter jars upon her—low birth, she thinks, will show itself after all; but when he reveals his princely rank she is overwhelmed by a different sort of amazement; he who had seemed so base is now become almost too high, being a prince: may not she herself still be the scorned one after all, and her morning dream a mockery! knight, knave, prince, and fool: she hates him and for ever!

But this is only a passing cloud of surprise and

anger. Her loving mood returns, and from the scene in the cave onwards it needs little prophetic power to forecast that Gareth will wed Lynette, and not—as Malory tells—her sister.

The songs of Lynette have a single, double, and triple reference, corresponding to the number of Gareth's victories: first victory, the morning star, one-fold; second victory, the sun and moon, flowers open and shut, birds' song at morn and eve, twofold; third victory, trefoil (a Druidical sacred symbol), the three primitive colours of the rainbow, threefold.

The fool's parable (l. 979) is their foolish symbolism of the Day—Dawn-star, Noon-sun, and Evening-star. There was no inner significance in their emblems, such as the poet wishes us to discover in this very obscure pourtrayal of the war of time against the soul of man.

Malory's Green Knight, Sir Pertolepe, becomes Tennyson's Knight of the Sun, with his yellow radiant shield, like the dandelion. The laureate has many allusions to this flower and its arrow-like seeds. For example:—

“Then, like the arrow-seeds of the field flower,  
    . . . A flower all gold.”—*The Poet*.

Again,

“Or from the tiny pitted target blew  
What look'd a flight of fairy arrows aim'd  
All at one mark, all hitting.”—*Aylmer's Field*.

Compare Shelley, “the old dandelion's hoary beard,”

*The Sunset*; and Wordsworth's *Poems on the Naming of Places*, iv.

The Knight of the Sun thinks that his brother has come (l. 1008) within his marches (limits), as Gareth is bearing the shield that he had taken from Sir Morning Star.

Sir Noon-Sun's face is like that "round unthinking face" with which the sun is frequently represented in pictures—apparently the roundness denotes its coin-like shape, as this middle knight seems to symbolise the love of gold in middle age.

To visor up (l. 1012) was to close the visor or front part of the helmet.

The mere "unhappiness," mishap (ll. 971 and 1033), to which Lynette ascribes Gareth's success, is from Malory, vii. Line 1048 alludes to the custom of decking the boar's head with "rosemary and bays" (*Pericles*, IV. iv. 160. Compare

"Where stood a boar's head garnished  
With bays and rosemarie."

Percy, *Rel.* ii. 347).

The third knight—Malory's Red Knight, Sir Perimones—seems as though he were naked, for he is wrapped in hardened skins that fit closely to his body. This fancy is not in Malory, but in the *Romance of Merlin* we are told that Arthur would have slain King Ryance "had not the sword been stopped by the toughness of a serpent's skin which he wore over his shirt"

(Ellis, *Metr. Rom.* p. 140). Somewhat similarly, in the *Nibelungen Lied*, Siegfried's own skin becomes *like horn*, invulnerable, after he has bathed in the blood of a dragon.

But, in fact, this is only one of the few tolerably obvious details of the super-subtle allegory of life's progress that underlies the story of these conflicts; for the hardened skins covering a man in the evening of life denote those indurated habits of a lifetime that become so unalterable at last. Tennyson gives us a hint of this in lines 1100-1104—

“For he seem'd as one  
That all in later, sadder age begins  
To war against ill uses of a life,” etc.

See Mr. Elsdale's *Studies in the Idylls*, p. 28.

Malory makes Gareth conquer five champions, the Black, Green, Red, and Blue Knights, and the Red Knight of the Red Lawns, besides dispersing the six caitiffs and slaying the two knights at the passage. Tennyson omits the fight with Sir Persant of Inde, the Blue Knight.

Pope's line, “Like buoys that never sink into the flood” (*Dunc.* iv. 241), will not bear comparison with Tennyson's fine simile of the buoy, dipping and springing for ever.

Lynette's encouragement of Gareth, line 1107, is not in Malory, who makes her continually taunt him, until at last she apologises in chapter xi., saying that “so

foul and shamefully did never woman rule a knight as I have done you, and ever courteously ye have suffered me, and that came never but of a gentle blood."

The "good red wine of Southland," line 1160, seems to echo Keats's lines to a nightingale.

*Cumb*, in line 1163, is a word of Welsh origin, and denotes the head of a valley.

The Latin words carved on the crag are like those that the vexillary or standard-bearer of the august second legion has left cut upon a cliff that overhangs the river Gelt, a small stream near Brampton in Cumberland. The carving is deeply chiselled upon a hard *sear*, and is as follows<sup>1</sup> :—

VEXIL . LEG . II . AVG.

The picture of the Soul, chased by the five emblems of Time, and fleeing to the hermit's cave, recalls Young's words in the *Night Thoughts*—

"Man flies from Time, and Time from man."

Lancelot's skilled spear (l. 1192) overthrows through its master's prowess, not through magic power, like the spears of Astolfo and of Britomarte, in Ariosto and Spenser respectively. The "lesser spear" in line 1213 is Gareth's own.

After Gareth's fall he reveals his name and lineage (l. 1200), which gives Lynette occasion to call him

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Queries*, 1888, pp. 408 and 413.

knight, knave, prince, and fool, for in all these aspects he has now appeared to her.

Lancelot makes light of Gareth's overthrow; he has been thrown himself, not once, but many a time. Thus Milton (*Hist. Eng.* iii.) says, "And the truth is, that valour may be overtoiled, and overcome at last with endless overcoming." Compare Spenser, *F. Q.*, II. v. 15, and Malory, I. xxiii., VIII. xxxiii., IX. xii. xxviii., for the same idea.

Lynette in line 1252 says that she has been unkind only as a mother is, who all day long has rated her child, but blesses him asleep. So in Richard Edwards's *Amantium Irae*, *Lovers' Quarrels*, published in the *Paradise of Daintie Devices*, 1576 :—

"In going to my naked bed, as one that would have slept,  
I heard a wife sing to her child, that long before had wept :  
She sighed sore and sang full sore, to bring the babe to rest,  
That would not rest but cried still in sucking at her breast :  
She was full weary of her watch, and grieved with her child,  
She rocked it and rated it, until on her it smiled :  
Then did she say now have I found the proverb true to prove  
The falling out of faithful friends is the renewing of love."

And again in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 88 (Golden Treasury ed.) : "Some cry out against sin, even as the mother cries out against her child on her lap, when she calleth it slut and naughtie girl, and then falls to hugging and kissing it."

The lance-splintering lions rampant are on Lancelot's shield (l. 1273), and are again described in *Elaine*, line

658,—azure lions, crowned with gold, ramping in the field of the shield. In the early *Lady of Shalott*

“A red-cross knight forever kneel’d  
To a lady in his shield,”

that is, Lancelot’s shield, and in some metrical romance such arms are ascribed to Sir Lancelot, but I have omitted to note the reference.

There are many astronomical allusions in the *Idylls*. Here, Arthur’s harp denotes a star that lies near the Pole-star and Arcturus, the three forming a triangle like a harp; and Mr. Collins notes that the *counter-motion to the clouds* has also been observed by Lucretius, iv. 446.

After the description of Lady Lyonors at her window, Tennyson leaves the old story, and, as a completion of the allegory, introduces a rather grotesque *dénouement*, namely, the cleaving of Death’s helmet, and the apparition of a blooming boy.

The sublime is divided at times by a very thin partition from the ludicrous. That such emblematic apparitions may be intensely thrilling and tragic, we know from the vision of the Bloody Child in *Macbeth*. There is a solemn grandeur too in some of Blake’s pictures conningling mundane and spiritual elements, as for instance in that one of the old man, swept by the wintry blast of Death into a sepulchre, above which is seated a noble form, Life rising out of Death. Even when in Spenser’s allegory Sansloy rends open his

antagonist's helmet and discovers the hoary head of Archimago, we are not shocked at the incongruity, because we know beforehand what is going to happen.

But in this surprise that Tennyson springs on us we have to ponder before we perceive any allegorical significance; the effectiveness of the matter disappears at one reading, and the lines leading up to the situation lose all interest for us thenceforward. It is in more senses than one an anti-climax. In admitting it, we have to shut our eyes to probability; for though Gareth's sword cleaves the helmet quite in twain, the bright boyish face emerges smiling and unhurt.

In this allegory, as in some others, the literal and the symbolical do not run exactly on all fours—either one side or the other limps a little.

As to the meaning of the occurrence, Mr. Elsdale says that "Death, though apparently the most formidable antagonist of all, turns out to be no real foe, and his fall ushers in the happier day from underground."

I do not know whether there is a double meaning intended in *underground*—the next sunrise from underground, and the resurrection from the grave; but it seems possible to assign two interpretations to the incident of the blooming boy. In one sense it may mean that Gareth has found Love instead of Death. In the other it may symbolise the words of the Greek



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poet: Who knows whether indeed Life be not Death,  
and Death Life?

“It is a modest creed, and yet  
Pleasant if one considers it,  
To own that Death itself must be  
Like all the rest, a mockery.”

SHELLEY, *The Scusltire Plant*.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MARRIAGE OF GERAINT

THE source of this and the following Idyll is the story of Geraint, the son of Erbin, in the *Mabinogion* of Lady Charlotte Guest. A French translation from the same source that Lady Guest has followed—the *Llyfr Coch o Hergest*, or Red Book of Hergest—will be found in M. de Villemarqué's *Table Ronde*, pp. 239-320, under the title of "Ghérent, ou Le Chevalier au Faucon."

In the original edition of the four Idylls of 1859, these two Geraint stories form one continuous poem, entitled "Enid."

By dividing the narrative into two portions the poet has equalised the parts to the average length of the other Idylls, and has concentrated the attention more closely upon the separate incidents denoted by the new titles.

In strict historical sequence the first 144 lines of the first Idyll belong to the beginning of the second, but by transferring them to the opening of the narrative

we are introduced dramatically into the middle of things at once.

Lady Guest's book being still hardly accessible to the general run of students, I am under the necessity of making some lengthy extracts from it, as otherwise it will be impossible to appreciate the subtle delicacy with which the poet has touched and at times transmuted his materials.

It should be added, however, that Lady Guest's narrative is less archaic than are the stories in the *Morte Darthur*; after comparing the Idyll and the Mabinogi there will not be much left for annotation.

Passing over the first 144 lines of the *Marriage of Geraint* for the present, so as to follow the narrative in the consecutive order of the Welsh story, we may begin with the speech of the forester, who brings to Arthur the news of the white stag.

"He is of pure white, Lord, and he does not herd with any other animal through stateliness and pride, so royal is his bearing. And I come to seek thy counsel, Lord, and to know thy will concerning him," p. 142. Compare *Marriage of Geraint*, l. 150.<sup>1</sup>

Arthur gives orders for the hunt to take place the next day, and grants Gwenhwyvar permission to be present. In the morning "Arthur wondered that

<sup>1</sup> The figures in square brackets, inserted in the extracts from the *Mabinogion*, indicate the lines of the Idyll that should be specially compared with the various passages.

Gwenhwyvar did not awake, and did not move in her bed; and the attendants wished to awaken her. 'Disturb her not,' said Arthur, 'for she had rather sleep than go to see the hunting'" [l. 157], p. 143.

"And after Arthur had gone forth from the palace, Gwenhwyvar awoke, and called to her maidens, and apparelled herself. 'Maidens,' said she, 'I had leave last night to go and see the hunt. Go one of you to the stable, and order hither a horse such as a woman may ride.' And one of them went, and she found but two horses in the stable, and Gwenhwyvar and one of her maidens mounted them, and went through the Usk, and followed the track of the men and the horses. And as they rode thus, they heard a loud and rushing sound; and they looked behind them [l. 164], and beheld a knight upon a hunter foal of mighty size; and the rider was a fair-haired youth, bare-legged, and of princely mien, and a golden-hilted sword was at his side, and a robe and a surcoat of satin were upon him, and two low shoes of leather upon his feet; and around him was a scarf of blue purple, at each corner of which was a golden apple [l. 169]. And his horse stepped stately, and swift, and proud; and he overtook Gwenhwyvar, and saluted her [l. 174]. 'Heaven prosper thee, Geraint,' said she; 'I knew thee when first I saw thee just now. And the welcome of heaven be unto thee. And why didst not thou go with thy lord to hunt?' 'Because I knew not when he went,' said he. 'I marvel too,' said she, 'how he could go unknown to

me.' 'Indeed, lady,' said he, 'I was asleep, and knew not when he went,'” p. 143.

So Geraint and Gwenhwyvar go to the edge of the forest, to hear the dogs [l. 182]. They hear a noise, and see a dwarf, with a whip in his hand, “riding upon a horse, stately, and foaming, and prancing, and strong, and spirited” [l. 187]. After him come a fair lady on a white horse, and a knight on a warhorse, “with heavy and bright armour both upon himself and his horse.”

Gwenhwyvar asks Geraint does he know the knight, but Geraint does not recognise him, and his heavy armour prevents his features from being seen.

“Go, maiden,” said Gwenhwyvar, “and ask the dwarf who that knight is” [l. 193]. When the maiden inquired of the dwarf,—“‘I will not tell thee,’ he answered. ‘Since thou art so churlish as not to tell me,’ said she, ‘I will ask him himself’ [l. 197]. ‘Thou shalt not ask him, by my faith,’ said he. ‘Wherefore?’ said she. ‘Because thou art not of honour sufficient to befit thee to speak to my Lord.’ Then the maiden turned her horse’s head towards the knight [l. 200], upon which the dwarf struck her with the whip that was in his hand across the face and the eyes, until the blood flowed forth. And the maiden, through the hurt she received from the blow, returned to Gwenhwyvar, complaining of the pain. ‘Very rudely has the dwarf treated thee,’ said Geraint; ‘I will go myself to know who the knight is’ [l. 203]. ‘Go,’ said

Gwenhwyvar. And Geraint went up to the dwarf. 'Who is yonder knight?' said Geraint. 'I will not tell thee,' said the dwarf. 'Then will I ask him himself,' said he. 'That wilt thou not, by my faith,' said the dwarf; 'thou art not honourable enough to speak with my Lord.' Said Geraint, 'I have spoken with men of equal rank with him.' And he turned his horse's head towards the knight; but the dwarf overtook him, and struck him as he had done the maiden, so that the blood coloured the scarf that Geraint wore [l. 207]. Then Geraint put his hand upon the hilt of his sword, but he took counsel with himself, and considered that it would be no vengeance for him to slay the dwarf, and to be attacked unarmed by the armed knight, so he returned to where Gwenhwyvar was" [l. 209].<sup>1</sup>

When Geraint returned to the Queen: "'Thou hast acted wisely and discreetly,' said she. 'Lady,' said he, 'I will follow him yet, with thy permission; and at last he will come to some inhabited place, where I may have arms either as a loan or for a pledge, so that I may encounter the knight' [l. 218]. 'Go,' said she, 'and do not attack him until thou hast good arms, and I shall be very anxious concerning thee, until I hear tidings of thee.' 'If I am alive,' said he, 'thou shalt

<sup>1</sup> It is not necessary to comment upon the differences that may be traced between these passages and the Idyll. The student will be able to do this more beneficially himself with the help of the references in brackets. Thus the motives that restrain Geraint's hand will be seen to be different in the Idyll from those here stated.

hear tidings of me by to-morrow afternoon ;' and with that he departed " [l. 222].

" And the road they took was below the palace of Caerlleon, and across the ford of the Usk ; and they went along a fair, and even, and lofty ridge of ground [l. 239], until they came unto a town [which is now called Cardiff, p. 155], and at the extremity of the town they saw a fortress and a castle. And they came to the extremity of the town. And as the knight passed through it, all the people arose, and saluted him, and bade him welcome. And when Geraint came into the town, he looked at every house, to see if he knew any of those whom he saw. But he knew none, and none knew him to do him the kindness to let him have arms either as a loan or for a pledge. And every house he saw was full of men, and arms, and horses. And they were polishing shields, and burnishing swords, and washing armour, and shoeing horses [l. 256]. And the knight, and the lady, and the dwarf, rode up to the castle that was in the town, and every one was glad in the castle [l. 251]. And from the battlements and the gates they risked their necks, through their eagerness to greet them, and to show their joy [l. 247]. Geraint stood there to see whether the knight would remain in the castle ; and when he was certain that he would do so, he looked around him ; and at a little distance from the town he saw an old palace in ruins, wherein was a hall that was falling to decay [l. 245]. And as he knew not any one in the town, he went towards the old palace ; and when

he came near to the palace, he saw but one chamber, and a bridge of marble-stone leading to it [l. 294]. And upon the bridge he saw sitting a hoary-headed man, upon whom were tattered garments. And Geraint gazed steadfastly upon him for a long time. Then the hoary-headed man spoke to him. 'Young man,' he said, 'wherefore art thou thoughtful?' 'I am thoughtful,' said he, 'because I know not where to go to-night' [l. 299]. 'Wilt thou come forward this way, chieftain?' said he, 'and thou shalt have of the best that can be procured for thee?' So Geraint went forward. And the hoary-headed man preceded him into the hall [l. 307]. And in the hall he dismounted, and he left his horse. Then he went on to the upper chamber with the hoary-headed man. And in the chamber he beheld an old decrepit woman, sitting on a cushion, with old, tattered garments of satin upon her [l. 363]; and it seemed to him that he had never seen a woman fairer than she must have been when in the fulness of youth. And beside her was a maiden, upon whom were a vest and a veil, that were old and beginning to be worn out [l. 364]. And truly, he never saw a maiden more full of comeliness, and grace, and beauty, than she. And the hoary-headed man said to the maiden, 'There is no attendant for the horse of this youth but thyself' [l. 370]. 'I will render the best service I am able,' said she, 'both to him and to his horse.' And the maiden disarrayed the youth, and then she furnished his horse with straw and with corn. And she went to



the hall as before, and then she returned to the chamber. And the hoary-headed man said to the maiden, 'Go to the town,' said he, 'and bring hither the best that thou canst find both of food and of liquor' [l. 383]. 'I will, gladly, Lord,' said she. And to the town went the maiden. And they conversed together while the maiden was at the town. And behold! the maiden came back, and a youth with her, bearing on his back a costrel full of good purchased mead, and a quarter of a young bullock [l. 386]. And in the hands of the maiden was a quantity of white bread, and she had some manchet bread in her veil [l. 389], and she came into the chamber. 'I could not obtain better than this,' said she, 'nor with better should I have been trusted.' 'It is good enough,' said Geraint. And they caused the meat to be boiled; and when their food was ready, they sat down [l. 391]. And it was on this wise; Geraint sat between the hoary-headed man and his wife, and the maiden served them" [l. 392].

After they have eaten, the old man tells Geraint his history. He says: "I had a nephew, the son of my brother, and I took his possessions to myself; and when he came to his strength, he demanded of me his property, but I withheld it from him. So he made war upon me and wrested from me all that I possessed."

The Welsh story thus seems to afford Elyrn some justification for his harsh treatment of the old Earl, but Tennyson makes Yniol the injured person, and Elyrn the wrongdoer. See lines 444-472 of the *Idyll*. Perhaps

it is partly as an atonement for this degradation of Edyrn's character—though mainly no doubt to illustrate the humanising effect of Arthur's system—that the poet speaks of Edyrn as afterwards coming to “loathe his crime of traitor” [l. 594]; and in the next Idyll makes him describe at some length the great reformation that has been wrought in him (*Geraint and Enid*, ll. 844-872). In thus departing from the Welsh narrative the character of Edyrn gains in consistency, and our sympathies are not divided as they would be if we had to consider Yniol the original transgressor.

Geraint asks the meaning of all the warlike preparations, and the old Earl replies: “The preparations are for the game that is to be held to-morrow by the young Earl, which will be on this wise. In the midst of a meadow which is here, two forks will be set up [l. 482], and upon the two forks a silver rod, and upon the silver rod a sparrow-hawk, and for the sparrow-hawk there will be a tournament [l. 484]. And to the tournament will go all the array thou didst see in the city, of men, and of horses, and of arms. And with each man will go the lady he loves best; and no man can joust for the sparrow-hawk except the lady he loves best be with him [l. 487]. And the knight that thou sawest has gained the sparrow-hawk these two years; and if he gains it the third year, they will, from that time, send it every year to him, and he himself will come here no more. And he will be called the Knight of the Sparrow-hawk from that time forth.”

Geraint tells the Earl how the maiden of the Queen and himself have been insulted by the dwarf, and asks his advice as to how he should obtain redress. "It is not easy to counsel thee," replies the Earl, "inasmuch as thou hast neither dame nor maiden belonging to thee, for whom thou canst joust [l. 493]. Yet I have arms here, which thou couldest have; and there is my horse also, if he seem to thee better than thine own." Geraint prefers his own horse to which he is accustomed, and adds: "'And if, when the appointed time shall come to-morrow, thou wilt permit me, sir, to challenge for yonder maiden that is thy daughter [l. 496], I will engage, if I escape from the tournament, to love the maiden as long as I live; and if I do not escape, she will remain unsullied as before.' 'Gladly will I permit thee,' said the hoary-headed man."

The tournament is to be held the next morning, adds the Earl, when the Knight of the Sparrow-hawk will "make proclamation, and ask the lady he loves best to take the sparrow-hawk. 'For,' he will say to her, 'thou art the fairest of women, and thou didst possess it last year, and the year previous; and if any deny it thee to-day, by force will I defend it for thee'" [l. 553].

At the tournament the next morning when the knight bids his lady fetch the bird, Geraint forbids her to do so. "'Fetch it not,' said Geraint, 'for there is here a maiden, who is fairer, and more noble, and more comely, and who has a better claim to it than

thou' [l. 556]. 'If thou maintainest the sparrow-hawk to be due to her, come forward and do battle with me.'

They break three spears each [l. 563], and many more. At first the Knight of the Sparrow-hawk prevails, and old Yniol gives Geraint his good lance that has been with him since he first received knighthood. The fight continues with lances, and then on foot with swords.

"Then the hoary-headed man saw Geraint receive a severe stroke, and he went up to him quickly, and said to him, 'Oh, chieftain, remember the treatment which thou hadst from the dwarf; and wilt thou not seek vengeance for the insult to thyself, and for the insult to Gwenhwyvar the wife of Arthur!'" [l. 571]. This rouses Geraint, and he smites his antagonist "upon the crown of his head, so that he broke all his head-armour, and cut through all the flesh and the skin, even to the skull, until he wounded the bone," p. 150.

After overthrowing Edyrn, Geraint bids him go at once with his damsel and dwarf to the Court and submit themselves unto the Queen for pardon. They set out immediately. The restitution of Yniol's lands is not ordered until subsequently, at a banquet.

Edyrn's reception at the Court need not be quoted as it does not come into the Idyll. The Welsh story only indirectly implies that he becomes a reformed character.

Geraint prepares to return, and the arraying of

Enid is told as follows: "'Where is the Earl Ynywl,' said Geraint, 'and his wife and his daughter?' 'They are in the chamber yonder,' said the Earl's chamberlain, 'arraying themselves in garments which the Earl has caused to be brought for them.' 'Let not the damsel array herself,' said he, 'except in her vest and veil, until she come to the Court to be clad by Gwenhwyvar [l. 228], in such garments as she may choose.' So the maiden did not array herself" [l. 760], p. 152.

They arrive at the Court, and "Arthur gave away the maiden to Geraint. And the usual bond made between two persons was 'made between Geraint and the maiden, and the choicest of all Gwenhwyvar's apparel was given to the maiden; and thus arrayed, she appeared comely and graceful to all who beheld her," p. 157.

In the Welsh story we now come to the part that stands first in the Idyll, and here Tennyson has made some changes also.

Instead of Geraint feeling uneasy on account of Enid's intimacy with Gwenhwyvar, as in the Idyll, it is Erbin, Geraint's father and Arthur's uncle, who sends to Arthur, saying that he "waxes old and feeble, and is advancing in years. And the neighbouring chiefs knowing this, grow insolent towards him, and covet his land and possessions." So he beseeches Arthur to let Geraint "return to him, to protect his possessions, and become acquainted with his boundaries," p. 158.

Arthur gives Geraint leave to depart. Many famous

knights accompany him, and he is received with honour and homage by the men of Cornwall.

For a time he frequents tournaments, but at length, having no one left to overcome, he grows slothful and uxorious. The *Mabinogi* continues: "And after that he began to shut himself up in the chamber of his wife, and he took no delight in anything besides, inso-much that he gave up the friendship of his nobles, together with his hunting and his amusements, and lost the hearts of all the host in his Court [l. 48]; and there was murmuring and scoffing concerning him among the inhabitants of the palace, on account of his relinquishing so completely their companionship for the love of his wife [l. 82]. And these tidings came unto Erbin. And when Erbin had heard these tidings, he spoke unto Enid, and inquired of her whether it was she that had caused Geraint to act thus, and to forsake his people and his hosts. 'Not I, by my confession to Heaven,' said she, 'there is nothing more hateful to me than this.' And she knew not what she should do, for, although it was hard for her to own this to Geraint, yet was it not more easy for her to listen to what she heard, without warning Geraint concerning it. And she was very sorrowful [l. 55]. And one morning in the summer time, they were upon their couch, and Geraint lay upon the edge of it. And Enid was without sleep in the apartment which had windows of glass [l. 71]. And the sun shone upon the couch. And the clothes had slipped from off his arms

and his breast, and he was asleep [l. 73]. Then she gazed upon the marvellous beauty of his appearance [l. 80], and she said, 'Alas, and am I the cause that these arms and this breast have lost their glory and the warlike fame which they once so richly enjoyed!' [l. 86]. And as she said this, the tears dropped from her eyes, and they fell upon his breast. And the tears she shed, and the words she had spoken, awoke him; and another thing contributed to awaken him, and that was the idea that it was not in thinking of him that she spoke thus, but that it was because she loved some other man more than him [l. 116], and that she wished for other society, and thereupon Geraint was troubled in his mind, and he called his squire; and when he came to him, 'Go quickly,' said he, 'and prepare my horse and my arms, and make them ready [l. 126]. And do thou rise,' said he to Enid, 'and apparel thyself; and cause thy horse to be accoutred, and clothe thee in the worst riding-dress that thou hast in thy possession [l. 130]. And evil betide me,' said he, 'if thou returnest here until thou knowest whether I have lost my strength so completely as thou didst say. And if it be so, it will then be easy for thee to seek the society thou didst wish for of him of whom thou wast thinking.' So she arose, and clothed herself in her meanest garments. 'I know nothing, Lord,' said she, 'of thy meaning.' 'Neither wilt thou know at this time,' said he" [l. 132], p. 162.

The "faded silk dress" which becomes in the Idyll

the occasion of the story of Geraint's marriage being told, is not mentioned in the Welsh tale. From these long extracts it will be seen that the changes made by Tennyson are all in the direction of ornateness. The simplicity of the old story is still to a certain degree preserved in the *idyllic* tone that pervades the poem, but the touches given by the poet impart a richness, a colour and variety, that greatly augment the beauty of the tale.

Some minor annotations may now be made.

Line 39, "To cleanse this common sewer of all his realm," is repeated in the next Idyll, line 894.

"A *fair* permission to depart" gives us a Shaksperian use of the adjective (l. 40).

The fine iteration in lines 50-54, "Forgetful of the falcon," etc., Mr. Collins compares with Keats's *Isabella* :—

"And she forgot the stars and moon and sun,  
And she forgot the blue above the trees,  
And she forgot the dells where waters run,  
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze."

But the device of iteration is of great antiquity. Spenser makes use of it in the "So downe he fell" description of the giant's overthrow; Taliessin employs it with extraordinary effect (see *Mabin.* p. 475); Virgil's *Sic vos non vobis* may be regarded as an example of the same sort; and in early Hebrew poetry the device is frequently and strikingly employed.



For the comparison of the muscles of Geraint's arm to a brook sloping over a little stone we have been referred by the critics to Theocritus; but it will be seen that the Sicilian's simile differs considerably from that contained in the English poet's verse. Calverley renders the Greek as follows:—

"Broad were his shoulders, vast his orb'd chest,  
And nigh the shoulder on each brawny arm  
Stood out the muscles, huge as rolling stones  
Caught by some rain-swoll'n river and shapen smooth  
By its wild eddyings."—*Idyll xxii.* p. 119.

In line 146 we are told that Arthur held court at Caerleon upon Usk. The romances very frequently mention these "plenary courts" (*cours plenières*), which were customarily held by the monarchs of France and England at the principal feasts of Easter, Whitsuntide, and Christmas (*Mabin.* p. 185). The Forest of Dean, in Gloucestershire, was anciently a very extensive tract of country west of the Severn; it now comprises about 22,000 acres and belongs to the Crown.

Line 158, "dreaming of her love for Lancelot," is a Tennysonian interpolation.

Guinevere's emphatic "Yea, though she were a beggar from the hedge" (l. 230) should be compared with "Hath picked a ragged-robin from the hedge" (l. 724), and also with Tennyson's early poem of *King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid*.

In the line, "A thousand pips eat up your sparrow-

hawk," the disease called the *pip*, which attacks young fowls, seems to be confused with another disease called *gapes*. The singular, *pip*, denotes a mucous accumulation that forms on the tongue of a chick; the *gapes* (plural) is a disease caused by the presence of a kind of small worm, that attacks the windpipe, and makes the bird keep its mouth wide open, whence the name. In Croker's *Fairy Legends*, p. 33, "the chickens died of the pip," we have the word correctly used. As *pips* are not insects, they cannot eat up sparrow-hawks. Gareth and Leodegran are learned neither in the diseases of chickens nor in the affinities of swifts and swallows.

The comparison of the twisted roots of trees to snakes is often found in poetry: see line 325, and the *Last Tournament*, line 13.

Geraint's exclamations, "Here by God's grace is the one voice for me" (l. 344), and "Here by God's rood is the one maid for me" (l. 368), recall Sir Ali-saunders's words in the *Morte Darthur* when he first sees Alice, La Beale Pilgrim: "Here have I found my love and my lady" (X. xxxix.)

Enid's song of Fortune's wheel deals with a world-old theme, but deals with it in a fresh and charming way.

The germ of the song has been traced to Dante, *Inferno*, xv. 95, but I should rather say that Dante refers to the same notion of the wheel of Fortune. There is no special similarity between Enid's song and

“For whatsoever fortune I am ready.  
Such handsel is not new unto mine ears,  
Therefore let Fortune turn her wheel around  
As it may please her.”—LONGFELLOW’S *Translation*.

At least as close a resemblance may be found in Hamlet’s “Man that Fortune’s buffets and rewards hath ta’en with equal thanks” (III. ii.) Even old Malory makes Lancelot say: “Fortune is so variant, and the wheel so movable, there is no constant abiding” (XX. xvii.); yet I do not think it necessary to suppose that Malory had to read Dante to discover the metaphor. In the *Princess*, vi., “The common hate with the revolving wheel Should drag you down,” implies the same idea. The line in the song that a man should lay to heart is the good anti-fatalistic “Man is man, and master of his fate”; that is to say, man is able to stand, though free to fall, not the creature of blind necessity. There is nothing more demoralising than the belief in a moral predestination, such as Tennyson protests against in the words—

“Man is man, and master of his fate.”

In a later poem—*Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*—the poet’s words are less great-hearted, though still strong and true—

“Follow Light, and do the Right—for man can half-control his doom.”

Spenser lays down the same principle (VI. ix. 30):  
“Each man unto himself his life may fortuneise”; the

doctrine is repeatedly stated in Milton's epic; and a German poet, Kinkel, expresses it well too,—“*Sein Schicksal schafft sich selbst der Mann.*”

The metrical structure of the song is original, but seems intended to convey a suggestion or reminiscence of the troubadour rondels and villanelles, such as a high-born maiden might have sung in an old baronial bower. In the same way, Tristram's songs in the *Last Tournament* recall the triolets of olden time.

The word *vermeil*—vermilion-coloured—in the compound *vermeil-white* is common in our older poets. Thus in the *Fuerie Queene*, II. iii. 22—

“In her cheekes the vermeil red did show  
Like roses in a bed of lilies shed”;

and Milton mentions “a vermeil-tinctured lip” (*Comus*).

Yniol quotes one line of Enid's song: “Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great” (l. 374); compare the closing lines of *Ulysses*: “One equal temper of heroic hearts,” etc.

Three illustrations of the *costrel* (l. 386), “a small vessel of leather, wood, or earthenware, generally with ears so as to be suspended by the side,” are given in Ogilvie's Dictionary. It was a vessel for holding ale or other drink; not for “flesh and wine,” as seems to be implied in the text. Manchet bread was a kind of fine white bread, and is several times mentioned by Chaucer. Tennyson takes both *costrel* and *manchet* from the Mabinogi.

The Limours named in line 440 appears in *Geraint and Enid*, line 277. M. de Villemarqué thinks that his name may have been derived from Limour, a commune of Rieux in Brittany (*Table R.* p. 301).

The "wild land" (l. 443) seems to mean the land that has not been brought under Arthur's rule and order.

The condition, in line 481, by which the knight's lady had to be present to qualify him for admission to a tourney or a castle, seems to have been often imposed in feudal times. Thus in Spenser, IV. i. 9 :—

"The custome of the placè was such, that hee  
Which hadde no Love nor Lemman there in store,  
Should either winne him one, or lye without the doore."

The Chair of Idris, line 543, is the great mountain of Cadr Idris, in Merionethshire.

Idris, in the Triads, is the inventor of the harp, and is coupled with Eidiol and Beli, making the three Primitive Bards (Villemarqué, *Table R.* 420).

The Mabinogi merely states that the prize was a sparrow-hawk. In describing the bird as made of gold (l. 550), Tennyson has probably taken a hint from Lady Guest's note on page 195, which speaks of "un faucon d'or" as having been the prize at a certain tournament.

In an early *Calendar of English Flowers* we are told that "Poor Ragged Robin blossoms in the haie" (hedge). It is a red wildflower, also called Cuckoo-flower, and is common in English hedgerows; but when

Enid's mother speaks of a Ragged Robin from the hedge (line 724, compare line 230), she is thinking less of the literal wildflower than of a ragged beggar-girl from the roadside.

In the Book of Esther we are told that King Ahasuerus "sent letters unto all the provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof," that "every man should bear rule in his own house"—a law of the Medes and Persians that must have resulted from very extensive henpecking—and that the king's servants, after the decree against the insubordinate Queen Vashti, said: "Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king; and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins," etc. (ii. 2).

Thus Esther is lighted upon.

Enid's mother, in line 731, thinks men might seek through Arthur's realm, as they sought through the provinces of Ahasuerus, and not find a fairer maid than Enid.

Milton tells us that it was the desire of British pearls that led the Roman Cæsar to invade Britain (*Hist. Eng.* ii.); but the laureate follows the more poetic Welsh tradition, that it was for the love of a fair British maiden named Flur, daughter of Mygnach Gorr, who was beloved also by Cassivelaunus or Casswallawn, son of Beli. Flur had been carried off by Mwrcan, a Gaulish prince, and ally of Cæsar, to whom he presented the lady.

Casswallawn led an army of sixty-one thousand men in pursuit, and after slaying six thousand of Cæsar's followers, recaptured his beloved. Hence was sung this Triad: "The three ardent lovers of the Island of Britain, Casswallawn the son of Beli for Flur the daughter of Mugnach Gorr, and Trystan the son of Talluch for Ysseult the wife of March Meirchawn his uncle, and Kynon the son of Clydrio Eiddin for Morvyth the daughter of Urien."<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson alludes in line 745 to this British Helen, "for whose love the Roman Cæsar first invaded Britain," and two lines previously to another fascinating damsel, whom Gwydion "made by glamour out of flowers" (l. 743). The tale of Blodeuwedd, the fair "Flower aspect," is told also in the *Mabinogion* (see pp. 426, 437, and 439, ed. 1877): "Well," said Math to Gwydion, "we will seek, I and thou, by charms and illusion, to form a wife for him out of flowers . . . so they took the blossoms of the oak, and the blossoms of the broom, and the blossoms of the meadow-sweet, and produced from them a maiden, the fairest and most graceful that man ever saw. And they baptized her, and gave her the name of Blodeuwedd."

And Taliessin sings too—

"Gwydion the son of Don, of toil severe,  
Formed a woman out of flowers."

In line 764 the *flaws*, sudden gusts of wind, lay or lodge the corn.

<sup>1</sup> *Mabinogion*, notes, pp. 38 and 292.

The quaint image of the careful robins eying the delver's toil, in line 774, is repeated in the next Idyll, line 431.

The prophecy of which Geraint is so confident, line 815, is his own. "false doom," mistaken judgment, in the next Idyll (l. 812).

*Gaudy-day*, line 818, is an old word for holiday, day of recreation (*gaudium*) ; we are told that Milton used sometimes to have a *gaudy-day* with his private friends.



## CHAPTER VIII

### GERAINT AND ENID

THE concluding half of the original Idyll of "Enid" must also be compared with the Mabinogi.

Taking up the story where it was broken off, at line 144 of the preceding Idyll, it now goes straight forward to the close. The poet departs more frequently from the original narrative in this second part, omitting several incidents, transposing the persons of Limours and Doorm, introducing Edyrn instead of the "Little King," and transferring Geraint's stay at Arthur's camp to the end of the poem.

In the Mabinogi the departure of Geraint is much less dramatically told than it is in the Idyll. Geraint there quietly takes leave of his father, saying that he is travelling into Lloegyr (now England) with only one follower. Note how finely the laureate has expanded what follows: "And he desired Enid to mount her horse, and to ride forward, and to keep a long way before him (*Geraint and Enid*, l. 14). 'And whatever thou mayest see, and whatsoever thou mayest hear,

concerning me,' said he, 'do thou not turn back [l. 17]. And unless I speak unto thee, say not thou one word either.' And they set forward. And he did not choose the pleasantest and most frequented road, but that which was the wildest [l. 28], and most beset by thieves, and robbers, and venomous animals [l. 31]. And they came to a high road, which they followed till they saw a vast forest, and they went towards it, and they saw four armed horsemen come forth from the forest [l. 56]. When the horsemen had beheld them, one of them said to the others, 'Behold, here is a good occasion for us to acquire two horses and armour, and a lady likewise; for this we shall have no difficulty in doing against yonder single knight, who hangs his head so pensively and heavily,'" p. 164.

Enid hears their talk, and resolves to warn Geraint. "'The vengeance of Heaven be upon me,' she said, 'if I would not rather receive my death from his hand than from the hand of any other [l. 68]; and though he should slay me, yet will I speak to him, lest I should have the misery to witness his death.'"

When he overtakes her she asks him has he heard what those men are saying. "'Thou hadst only,' said he, 'to hold thy peace as I bade thee. I wish but for silence, and not for warning. And though thou shouldst desire to see my defeat, and my death [l. 80] by the hands of these men, yet do I feel no dread.'"

Tennyson reduces the number to three, but makes

them all charge at once, as caitiff knights do. In the Mabinogi, the four robbers attack singly, and are one by one overthrown. Geraint gives Enid the four horses laden with armour to drive before her, and renews his command of silence.

The Idyll describes the conflicting thoughts in Geraint's mind as they proceed. There is no suggestion of this in the Mabinogi, which continues the story of their journey, that led through a wood, and across a plain, "in the centre of which was a group of thickly-tangled copsewood"; or as the Idyll translates this—

"The first shallow shade of a deep wood,  
Before a gloom of stubborn-shafted oaks."

Three armed horsemen come towards them, and again Enid overhears their talk. "'Behold, here is a good arrival for us; here are coming for us four horses and four suits of armour. We shall easily obtain them, in spite of yonder dolorous knight, and the maiden also will fall into our power' [l. 127]. 'This is but too true,' said she to herself, 'for my husband is tired with his former combat [l. 133]. The vengeance of Heaven will be upon me, unless I warn him of this.' So the maiden waited until Geraint came up to her."

She tells him that these men say they will easily obtain all this spoil. "'I declare to Heaven,' he answered, 'that their words are less grievous to me than that thou wilt not be silent, and abide by my counsel'" [l. 150].

The poet (he that tells the tale) inserts from his own observation the comparison of the fallen knight transfixed by the broken spear, to the great piece of a promontory slipping down with a tree still growing on it.<sup>1</sup>

Neither has the prose story any trace of the simile of the cataract's drumming thunder (l. 172), a description that can hardly be surpassed for felicitous truth to nature.

The poet omits Geraint's next exploit : a victory over five knights [p. 166], which raises to twelve the number of laden horses that Enid has to drive before her. They pass the night in a wood, Geraint sleeping and Enid watching. Next morning they continue their journey until they arrive at a tract of open country, with meadows, and mowers at work. Compare what follows with the Idyll, lines 195-244 : "And they went up out of the river by a lofty steep ; and there they met a slender stripling, with a satchel about his neck, and they saw that there was something in the satchel, but they knew not what it was. And he had a small blue pitcher in his hand, and a bowl on the mouth of the pitcher. And the youth saluted Geraint. 'Heaven

<sup>1</sup> Compare *Amphion*, of the trees dancing downhill : "Like some great landslip side by side The country side descended" ; and Spenser, *F. Q.*, l. xi. 54—

"So downe he fell, as an huge rocky clift,  
Whose false foundation waves have washt away,  
And rolling downe, great Neptune doth dismay ;  
So downe he fell, and like an heaped mountaine lay."

prosper thee,' said Geraint, 'and whence dost thou come?' 'I come,' said he, 'from the city that lies before thee. My Lord,' he added, 'will it be displeasing to thee if I ask whence thou comest also?' 'By no means — through yonder wood did I come.' 'Thou camest not through the wood to-day.' 'No,' he replied, 'we were in the wood last night.' 'I warrant,' said the youth, 'that thy condition there last night was not the most pleasant, and that thou hadst neither meat nor drink.' 'No, by my faith,' said he. 'Wilt thou follow my counsel,' said the youth, 'and take thy meal from me?' 'What sort of meal?' he inquired. 'The breakfast which is sent for yonder mowers, nothing less than bread and meat and wine; and if thou wilt, sir, they shall have none of it.' 'I will,' said he, 'and Heaven reward thee for it.'

"So Geraint alighted, and the youth took the maiden from off her horse. Then they washed, and took their repast. And the youth cut the bread in slices, and gave them drink, and served them withal. And when they had finished, the youth arose, and said to Geraint, 'My Lord, with thy permission, I will now go and fetch some food for the mowers.' 'Go, first, to the town,' said Geraint, 'and take a lodging for me in the best place that thou knowest, and the most commodious one for the horses, and take thou whichever horse and arms thou choosest in payment for thy service and thy gift.' 'Heaven reward thee, Lord,' said the youth, 'and this would be ample to repay services

much greater than those I have rendered unto thee," p. 167.

The boy goes to the palace and tells the Earl of that town the whole occurrence. The Earl, who is named Dwrn (Doorm), bids the boy return to tell the strange knight that he will be welcome if he comes to the castle ; but Geraint will only go to the lodging that has been hired for him.

"And after they had disarrayed themselves, Geraint spoke thus to Enid : 'Go,' said he, 'to the other side of the chamber, and come not to this side of the house ; and thou mayest call to thee the woman of the house, if thou wilt.' 'I will do, Lord,' said she, 'as thou sayest.'"

Both Limours and Doorm are names of persons in the Welsh story, but Tennyson has transposed their names without greatly altering their characters. The only important change is that he makes Limours Enid's formerly rejected lover. Neither Dwrn nor Limours in the Mabinogi had known Enid before the meetings here described.

Geraint asks the man of the house whether he has any friends that he would like to invite. He has, he replies ; and Geraint says, "Bring them hither, and entertain them at my cost with the best thou canst buy in the town" [ll. 285-288], p. 169.

The Earl Dwrn comes in the evening—not boisterously as in the Idyll Limours comes, but with due ceremony, accompanied by twelve knights. While

conversing with Geraint he sees Enid, and looks at her steadfastly. "And he thought he had never seen a maiden fairer or more comely than she. And he set all his thoughts and his affections upon her. Then he asked of Geraint, 'Have I thy permission to go and converse with yonder maiden, for I see that she is apart from thee?' [l. 298]. 'Thou hast it gladly,' said he. So the Earl went to the place where the maiden was and spoke to her. 'Ah maiden,' said he, 'it cannot be pleasant to thee to journey thus with yonder man!' 'It is not unpleasant to me,' said she, 'to journey the same road that he journeys.' 'Thou hast neither youths nor maidens to serve thee,' said he [l. 322]. 'Truly,' she replied, 'it is more pleasant for me to follow yonder man, than to be served by youths and maidens.' 'I will give thee good counsel,' said he. 'All my earldom will I place in thy possession, if thou wilt dwell with me.' 'That will I not, by Heaven,' she said, 'yonder man was the first to whom my faith was ever pledged, and shall I prove inconstant to him!' 'Thou art in the wrong,' said the Earl; 'if I slay the man yonder, I can keep thee with me as long as I choose; and when thou no longer pleasest me I can turn thee away [l. 338]. But if thou goest with me by thine own good-will, I protest that our union shall continue eternal and undivided as long as I remain alive.' Then she pondered these words of his, and she considered that it was advisable to encourage him in his request [l. 352]. 'Behold, then, chieftain, this is most expedient for thee to do to

save me any needless imputation ; come here to-morrow, and take me away as though I knew nothing thereof'' [l. 357], p. 170.

The Earl's boasting speeches are not in the prose story, which narrates that after Dwrm's departure Enid says nothing to her lord lest he be angry and uneasy, but sets his armour in readiness, and at midnight awakes him and tells him of the Earl's intended attack. Geraint sends her to call the landlord, and gives him eleven horses and eleven suits of armour. "'Heaven reward thee, Lord,' said he, 'but I spent not the value of one suit of armour upon thee.' 'For that reason,' said he, 'thou wilt be the richer.'"

The landlord guides them out of the town, and returns to find his house beset by eighty armed knights. At daybreak Enid sees the dust of the pursuing troop, and again warns Geraint, who once more blames her for breaking silence. He overthrows the eighty knights, one after another, and Dwrm the last. Tennyson's changes here are all in the direction of probability. He makes the Earl the first to fall, and one other knight is overthrown after him, when the rest scatter before Geraint like a shoal of small fish.

After this exploit Geraint comes to the territory of Gwiffert Petit, as "he is called by the Franks, but the Cymry call him the Little King." Tennyson omits the fight with Gwiffert, in which Geraint, though victorious, is wounded [see l. 501]. Gwiffert swears fealty, and reappears at a later stage of the Mabinogi, when in the



Idyll his part is given to Edyrn, the reformed knight of the sparrow-hawk.

Though wounded, Geraint rides onward till he comes near to where Arthur happens to be encamped.

Sir Kay meets him and tries to force him to come before the king, but gets himself "rolled headlong" for his trouble. The smooth-speaking Gwalchmai (Gawain) is sent by Arthur, and he and Geraint fight for a space, until Gwalchmai recognises his antagonist, and sends a page to tell Arthur that it is Geraint, but that he will hardly be induced to come unless Arthur's camp is pitched alongside of the road that he is travelling. This is done, and Geraint is met by Arthur and Gwenhwyvar, who entertain him and Enid for nearly a month.

Tennyson has transferred this to the close of the Idyll; see ll. 873-928.

Geraint's wounds are attended to by Arthur's chief physician, Morgan Tud, and his disciples [l. 922; compare *Balin*, l. 270]; and as soon as he is healed he asks Arthur's leave to depart, which is reluctantly granted. He and Enid set out, and meet a lady weeping beside a dead knight. Leaving Enid with her, Geraint goes in pursuit of the three enormous giants who have slain her lord. He kills them, but is himself so battered by the third giant that his old wounds re-open and bleed afresh. He rides back to Enid, and, as in the Idyll, falls fainting from his horse.

The Earl of Limours (Tennyson's Doorm) happens to be passing, and hears Enid's "piercing and loud and

thrilling" cry. The two forlorn ladies explain the reason of their lamentations. The story and the Idyll agree closely in what follows:—

"The Earl caused the knight that was dead to be buried, but he thought that there still remained some life in Geraint; and to see if he yet would live [l. 552] he had him carried with him in the hollow of his shield [l. 568] and upon a bier. And the two damsels went to the Court; and when they arrived there, Geraint was placed upon a litter-couch in front of the table that was in the hall [l. 572]. Then they all took off their travelling gear, and the Earl besought Enid to do the same, and to clothe herself in other garments [l. 678]. 'I will not, by Heaven,' said she [l. 697]. 'Ah, Lady,' said he, 'be not so sorrowful for this matter.' 'It were hard to persuade me to be otherwise,' said she. 'I will act towards thee in such wise, that thou needest not be sorrowful, whether yonder knight live or die. Behold, a good earldom, together with myself, will I bestow on thee; be, therefore, happy and joyful' [l. 625]. 'I declare to Heaven,' said she, 'that henceforth I shall never be joyful while I live' [l. 648]. 'Come then,' said he, 'and eat.' 'No, by Heaven, I will not,' she answered [l. 654]. 'But, by Heaven, thou shalt,' said he. So he took her with him to the table against her will; and many times desired her to eat. 'I call Heaven to witness,' said she, 'that I will not eat until the man that is upon yonder bier shall eat likewise' [l. 655]. 'Thou canst not fulfil that,'

said the Earl, 'yonder man is dead already' [l. 671]. 'I will prove that I can,' said she. Then he offered her a goblet of liquor [l. 658]. 'Drink this goblet,' he said, 'and it will cause thee to change thy mind.' 'Evil betide mē,' she answered, 'if I drink aught until he drink also' [l. 665]. 'Truly,' said the Earl, 'it is of no more avail for me to be gentle with thee than ungentle.' And he gave her a box in the ear [l. 717]. Thereupon she raised a loud and piercing shriek, and her lamentations were much greater than they had been before, for she considered in her mind that had Geraint been alive, he durst not have struck her thus [l. 720]. But, behold, at the sound of her cry, Geraint revived from his swoon, and he sat up on the bier, and finding his sword in the hollow of his shield [l. 725], he rushed to the place where the Earl was, and struck him a fiercely-wounding, severely venomous, and sternly-smiting blow upon the crown of his head, so that he clove him in twain, and his sword was stayed by the table. Then all left the board, and fled away [l. 731]. And this was not so much through fear of the living as through the dread they felt at seeing the dead man rise up to slay them. And Geraint looked upon Enid, and he was grieved for two causes; one was to see that Enid had lost her colour and her wonted aspect; and the other, to know that she was in the right. 'Lady,' said he, 'knowest thou where our horses are?' 'I know, Lord, where thy horse is,' she replied, 'but I know not where is the other. Thy horse is in the house yonder' [l. 748]. So he went

to the house, and brought forth his horse, and mounted him, and took Enid from the ground, and placed her upon the horse with him" [l. 749], p. 179.

They ride off, and soon hear a knight galloping after them. Geraint puts Enid down, and prepares for battle, but the stranger turns out to be the Little King, Gwiffert, who, having heard of Geraint's danger, is coming to his aid.

Tennyson here introduces Edyrn in place of Gwiffert Petit.

With the rest of the old story we need not now concern ourselves, but the *Mabinogion* must be named as being the book, next to Malory's *Morte Darthur*, that the student of the Tennysonian *Idylls* may study with the greatest advantage. It was first published in 1838, and was reprinted in 1877 by Mr. Quaritch.<sup>1</sup>

The opening apostrophe has been compared to the well-known lines of Lucretius, ii. 14-16 :—

"O miseras hominum mentes, O pectora caeca,  
Qualibus in tenebris vitae, quantisque periclis,  
Degitur hoc aevi quodcumque."

Milton (*Hist.* ii.) tells how the Britons took refuge in "plashy fens," such gray swamps and pools as the heron loves (l. 31). In line 49 we have another graphic bit of bird-life; when Enid is startled by the

<sup>1</sup> Through whose courteous permission I am enabled to give the foregoing extracts.

great plover's human whistle—the shrill call of the stone curlew or Norfolk plover, which thus often deceives wanderers on the wolds.<sup>1</sup>

The “wild ways” of the wood, line 187, is a phrase used by Malory: “so Sir Launcelot rode many wild ways, throughout marshes and many wild ways” (VI. xvii.)

Geraint's “false doom,” misjudgment, mistaken prediction (line 247), is given in the preceding Idyll, line 814.

The amulets or little rings of rushes twisted by girls (see line 258) are often mentioned in our old poets, as for instance in Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, I. iii.: “or gather rushes, to make many a ring for thy long fingers.”

Limours tells “free tales,” licentious stories, line 291; in keeping with the character that has been ascribed to him by Yniol in the preceding Idyll, line 240.

“Lovers' quarrels oft in pleasing concord end,” says Milton; and Tennyson's reference to such quarrels in line 324 may be illustrated by the lines previously quoted from Edwards's *Amantium Irac*, and by the tender song in the *Princess*: “As through the land at eve we went.”

<sup>1</sup> *Oedipennus scolopax*, the great plover, has “a very loud shrill note” in May. Montagu, *Diet. Birds*, p. 52. There is a curious notion about some species of plovers, that their bodies are inhabited by the souls of those Jews who took part in crucifying Christ. See Dyer, *Eng. Folklore*, p. 95.

Limours says that his malice is no deeper than a moat (line 340); he only means to imprison Geraint, not to kill him (as Dwrm offers to do). He departs boasting that Enid cares not a "broken egg-shell for her lord." So in *Hamlet*, IV. iv. 53, an egg-shell is taken as denoting something worthless :—

"Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,  
Even for an egg-shell."

The *sudden* honesty of the landlord, taken by surprise (line 410), is characteristic of Tennyson's humorous comprehension of *mén* of this class.

The use of *bicker*, that is, flash, glitter, in line 449, "Dust, and the point of lances bicker in it," is the same as in the *Princess*, v. : "and bickers into red and emerald." In line 325 it means quarrel slightly : "tho' men may bicker with the things they love." The original sense of the word was to "skirmish."

The "dry shriek," line 461, is a Latinism (Collins, p. 137).

In line 475, "the cressy islets," masses of water-cress, in

"The brook that loves  
To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand."  
*Ode to Memory.*

Perhaps the story of Enoch Arden may have been in the poet's mind when he wrote lines 496-499 :—

“ But as a man to whom a dreadful loss  
Falls in a far land and he knows it not,  
But coming back he learns it, and the loss  
So pains him that he sickens nigh to death.”

A woman weeping for her murdered mate was taken little notice of in that lawless realm : compare *Last Tournament*, line 492.

In line 568 we are told that they carried Geraint “all in the hollow of his shield.” This detail is from the Welsh story ; it was the usual and obvious mode of carrying a wounded soldier. The saying of the Spartan mother will occur as a familiar example of the ancient practice. Malory twice mentions this manner of carrying wounded men (VIII. xiv., IX. xii.), and Spenser once (*F. Q.*, VI. ii. 48).

The beautiful description of pure and noble women — “those gracious things” (line 635)—directs attention to this use of *gracious*, frequent in Shakspeare, to denote a combination of exquisite physical charm with spiritual dignity and holiness. Spenser also speaks of “gracious womanhood” (*F. Q.*, II. ii. 15).

We are almost reminded of the words of Comus, “it is for homely features to keep home,” in the thought of Limours, similar in spirit though different in expression : “I love that beauty should go beautifully” (line 680 ; *Comus*, l. 748).

The palfrey, line 749, so often mentioned in romantic poetry, was a light horse or pony, used as a hackney by a knight, when he “listed ease his battle steed.”

Tennyson's vale of Avilion is a place "where falls not hail or rain or any snow"; and in line 770 here he seems to imply that the "useful *trouble* of the rain" only came after man's departure from Paradise. This is not exactly stated in Genesis ii., where we read that *before* the plantation of Eden "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth. . . . But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." Milton makes Eve in Eden speak of "the fertile earth after soft showers."

Edyrn's paradox, "By overthrowing me you threw me higher," is in the style of Milton's "By owing owes not, but still pays, at once indebted and discharged."

The vicious *quitch* (line 902) is a species of worthless grass, hard to eradicate from land under cultivation.

"The south-west that blowing Bala lake  
Fills all the sacred Dee" (l. 928).

Bala lake lies in a north-easterly and south-westerly direction, and the Dee flows north out of it. The holy Dee is "sacred with Druidic and Arthurian legends," says Professor Masson, note on *Lycidas*, l. 55.

*The Scouring of the White Horse*, a book by Mr. Thomas Hughes, tells how nowadays "men weed the white horse on the Berkshire hills To keep him bright and clean as heretofore" (line 935). There is a huge figure of a horse, 374 feet long, cut in the turf on a chalky hillside near Wantage in Berkshire. It was made to commemorate Alfred's victory of Æscesdun



over the Danes in the reign of Ethelred. The White Horse was the emblem of Hengist (compare "The Lords of the White Horse," *Guinevere*, l. 570). It represented the horse of Odin, the war-god of northern mythology.

Geraint fell at last (line 966) fighting against the Saxons, at the battle of Llongborth—that is, the "Haven of Ships," variously conjectured to have been Portsmouth or Langport. See Lady Guest's note, pp. 192-194.

## CHAPTER IX

### BALIN AND BALAN

THIS Idyll was first published in *Tiresias and other Poems*, in 1885. The story is much abridged from Malory's second book, of which chapters i. ii. and xii.-xix. should be specially compared; although the romance is here used as a mere formal outline, which the poet has filled in with character and incident and ornamental detail of his own devising.

Thus Malory affords no hint of Arthur's tilting with Balin and Balan beside the fountain, or of the reformation of Balin, or of his taking the Queen's crown as his emblem, or of his conversation with the old (Simon Lee-like) labourer, when he goes in quest of the "devil in the woods."

The poet omits the "dolorous stroke" that connects the old story more closely with the Grail legend; but, on the other hand, he creates the Lancelot and Guinevere interview, and brings Vivien on the scene, so as to make the Idyll, as is stated in a foot-note to the first

edition, "an introduction to Merlin and Vivien."<sup>1</sup> The circumstances that lead up to the death-scene of the brothers are also considerably altered.

In the interview between Lancelot and the Queen the still small voice is shown to be troubling the former, although the "bonds that so defame him" are of force to bind him still. Guinevere sees that her lover is ill at ease about something, but if she divines the cause she only asks: "Art thou sad? or sick? . . . Sick, or for any matter angered with me?"

In representing Lancelot as having qualms of conscience while Guinevere has none, the poet seems to indicate that when a man thus sins he is at times troubled by remorse, even though he disregard its sting; but that when a woman takes the fatal step, self-reproach is silent in her heart thenceforward. There is no going back for her, even though she may have miscounted the cost; only a great revulsion of feeling, as in the cases of Ettarre and Guinevere, may be wrought at last, when utterly and hopelessly too late. If this is so, Byron perhaps rightly explains its reason:

"Love is of man's life a thing apart,  
"Tis woman's whole existence."

And this shows us what Vivien means when she says

<sup>1</sup> Malory's seventeenth chapter, "How that knight slew his love and a knight with her," is recalled by what we read in the story of Pelleas and Ettarre. With the "bridge of iron and steel" in chapter xix. we should perhaps compare the *Grail*, l. 500; and with the account of the spear of Longinus, Bk. XI. chap. iv.

that "man dreams of fame while woman wakes to love." There is something oriental in such a conception of woman's loving not wisely, and indeed at first sight it indicates a rather more Byronic view of erring woman's character than one would have expected from the author of *Isabel*. But the poet always draws a wide distinction between "those gracious things," true women, and those false women who have forfeited that honoured state of perfect chastity. It is of the latter class that Ettarre and Guinevere are types: and

"Men at most differ as Heaven and earth;  
But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell."

The character of Pellam is also changed and elaborated in the Idyll. He seems to be the typical ceremonialist in religious matters, binding himself to form rather than seeking the operative spirit of piety. He has a shrine full of holy relics; the Christ in his chapel can scarce be seen amid the crowded images of saints—and yet he tolerates the murderous Garlon!

The painfully false position in which the knights are beginning to find themselves—bound by their vows to uphold the ideal purity of Arthur's Court, and to vindicate the reputation of a Queen whose chastity they themselves mistrust—is shown in the thoughts that poison Balin's rest after his reply to Garlon's scornful slanders in the hall of Pellam.

Then Vivien is introduced travelling to the hall of Camelot, on her way to work out the plot that she

and Mark have laid,—their scheme of stirring up the “snakes within the grass” of Arthur’s Court. How she will effect this will be seen in the next Idyll and in *Guinevere*.

With her fluent lies she easily intensifies Balin’s suspicions until they engender passionate rage against the Queen, and he furiously stamps out her royal emblem from his shield.

Balan appears at this moment, and the brothers slay each other in brainless fight. Vivien leaves them with a scold—she cannot bear to look upon dead bodies.

The four types of malignity in the *Idylls* have now all come upon the scene—the man of envious ambition, rebelling against lawful sway; the man of vice and treachery, hating noble aims; the man of secret slanders, inflicting wounds unseen; and the harlot, delighting in ensnaring others and making them like herself in baseness,—Modred, and Mark, and Garlon, and Vivien.

At the outset of the poem Tennyson tells that Balin has gone into exile for three years as a punishment for having struck a thrall. Malory (II. iii.) relates that he left the Court after slaying the Lady of the Lake.

There must have been several Ladies of the Lake, for Merlin comes to Arthur just after this occurrence, and in a later book we are told how he falls in a dotage about Nimue, one of the damsels of the lake. But if there is any inconsistency in the *Morte Darthur* here, it is only one of the many romantic absurdities that in a later age incurred the ridicule of Cervantes. If this

lady whom Balin slays was Viviane, she resembles her namesake in the *Idylls* at least in one respect, for Merlin says of her that "she never came in fellowship of worship"—that is, good company—"to do good, but always great harm" (II. iv.) Yet in IV. ix. she saves Arthur's life "for love of King Arthur."

The romance next tells how Balin and Balan meet, and together overcome Arthur's enemy, King Ryons (Rience) of North Wales. Arthur is much pleased, and his anger against Balin is assuaged. He sends Balin to bring before him a knight, who agrees to come if Balin becomes his surety against all harm. Balin does so, but on their way, "as they were even before King Arthur's pavilion, there came one invisible, and smote this knight that went with Balin throughout the body with a spear. Alas! said the knight, I am slain under your conduct, with a knight called Garlon." Balin vows to avenge his death. Another knight joins him (ch. xiii.), and is also "slain by this traitor knight that rides invisible."

Balin goes to Pellam's castle and is admitted. "Soon Balin asked a knight, Is there not a knight in this court whose name is Garlon? Yonder he goeth, said the knight, he with the black face; he is the marvellest knight that is now living, for he destroyeth many good knights, for he goeth invisible." Ah, well, said Balin, is that he? Then Balin advised him long: If I slay him here I shall not escape, and if I leave him now, peradventure I shall

never meet with him again at such a good time, and much harm he will do and he live. Therewith this Garlon espied that this Balin beheld him, and then he came and smote Balin in the face with the back of his hand, and said, Knight, why beholdest thou me so? for shame, therefore, eat thy meat, and do that thou came for. Thou sayest sooth, said Balin, this is not the first despite that thou hast done me, and therefore I will do that I came for; and rose up fiercely, and clave his head to the shoulders" (II. xiv.)

Then Pellam encounters Balin and breaks Balin's sword. "And when Balin was weaponless he ran into a chamber for to seek some weapon, and so from chamber to chamber, and no weapon could he find, and always King Pellam after him. And at the last he entered into a chamber that was marvellously well dight and richly, and a bed arrayed with cloth of gold, the richest that might be thought, and one lying therein, and thereby stood a table of clean gold, with four pillars of silver that bare up the table, and upon the table stood a marvellous spear, strangely wrought. And when Balin saw that spear he gat it in his hand, and turned him to King Pellam, and smote him passingly sore with that spear, that King Pellam fell down in a swoon, and therewith the castle roof and walls brake and fell to the ground (xv.) . . . And that was the same spear that Longius smote our Lord to the heart" (xvi.)

This wound of Pellam's is the famous "dolorous

stroke" that Galahad at length heals in the quest of the Holy Grail. In the story of Peredur in the *Mabinogion* the "Holy Spear" is also introduced.

Omitting some incidents, we find Balin going to an island to meet a strange adventure. A squire offers to lend him his shield, as it is larger than Balin's own. He takes it, and encounters Balan, who does not recognise him on account of the strange shield. There is less pathos than usual in Malory's account—or perhaps there seems to be less after one has read Tennyson's touching description. They are both overthrown in the onset, and lie as in a swoon; but "Balin was bruised sore with the fall of his horse, for he was weary of travel." They arise and continue the fight with their swords, and smite sorely, inflicting seven great wounds on each other. "At the last Balan, the younger brother, withdrew him a little and laid him down. Then said Balin le Savage, What knight art thou? for or now found I never no knight that matched me. My name is, said he, Balan, brother to the good knight, Balin. Alas! said Balin, that ever I should see this day. And therewith he fell backward in a swoon. Then Balan went on all four feet and hands, and put off the helm of his brother, and might not know him by the visage, it was so full hewen and bled; but when he awoke he said, O Balan, my brother, thou hast slain me and I thee, wherefore all the wide world shall speak of us both. Alas! said Balan, that ever I saw this day, that through mishap I might not know you, for I



espied well your two swords, but because ye had another shield I deemed you had been another knight" (II. xviii.) The death-scene is considerably spun out with trivialities, but the foregoing will give a sufficient idea of it.

Going through the Idyll again to comment on particular passages, we first notice that the essential basis of Arthur's moral system is the supremacy of truth. Man's word is God in man; the truth must be followed in scorn of consequence. Arthur's dictum in line 8 has previously occurred in the *Coming of Arthur*, l. 132.

The lady-fern, line 24, is a species of fern dedicated to our Lady, the Virgin Mary. "Besides this the maiden-hair variety is in some places called Maria's Fern, and in the countries farther north will be found many names for this class of plants, which prove that they once belonged to Venus or Freyja, and have now been claimed for the Virgin. In Scotland we find one kind of fern called Lady-Bracken."<sup>1</sup>

After Balin has spoken of himself to Arthur, he adds in line 68—

"A man of thine to-day  
Abashed us both, and brake my boast."

This is strictly in accordance with the laws of chivalry, for the oath of knighthood required that the knight should not try to conceal defeat, but should openly confess it (see *Mabin.* p. 52).

<sup>1</sup> H. Friend, *Flowers and Flowerlore*, p. 98.

The spiritual harmony that Arthur aims at establishing is expressed in the words, line 74, repeated in line 208—

“And move  
To music with thine Order and the King.”

Compare *Harold*, II. ii.—

“And make your ever-jarring Earldoms move  
To music and in order.”

The rejoicing in Heaven over the “Lost one found,” line 78, is an allusion to the three parables in St. Luke xv.

The legend of Joseph of Arimathea has been already touched upon in chapter iii., and will be again in discussing the *Holy Grail*.

Tennyson calls Pellam this “gray king,” hoary, venerable; as he also calls Arthur, in the closing lines “To the Queen”; but in the latter passage the epithet seems rather to denote dimness, indistinctness through the mists of time.

The Roman soldier, line 111, is named Longius in Malory, and Longinus in the ecclesiastical legends.

Pellam calls Garlon his “heir”; in Malory they are said to be brothers.

Black magic, line 124, the black art, is a term derived from a mistranslation of *nigromancy*, which should properly have been spelt *necromancy*; see Trench, *Eng. P. and P.*

The figurative description of the slandered man,

wounded by *blind* tongues, recalls Virgil's use of *caveus*, *Aen.* x. 733, of wounds upon the back. Milton has "blind mouths" (*Lyrid.*), and "airy tongues that syllable men's names" (*Com.*); and Spenser describes Envy as sharpening her bitter words "most shameful, most unrighteous, most untrue," with the "sting which in her vile tongue grew" (*E. Q.*, V. xii. 31-42). See the note on *Pelleas* 565 also.

Arthur's words, "Let who goes before me, see he do not fall behind me," line 131, refer to Pellam's life of ceremonial purity, and his boast that it is purer than Arthur's own life (l. 104). We may paraphrase it: Let any man, for instance Pellam, who boasts himself as leading a purer life than Arthur, see that he do not lead a life less pure in reality, as Pellam will do if he tolerates crimes such as Garlon commits. The passage is obscured by the pronouns, which appear at first sight to refer to Garlon, and to some one sent before Arthur; but it is one of those general maxims that Arthur is fond of enunciating, and may be taken generally as well as with special reference to Pellam.

The contrast is strikingly shown between Balin, the well-meaning but violent man, whose natural temper tries him beyond bearing, and Balan, the man of placid and regulated mind, who easily bears the yoke of obedience to conventional control.

Balan has been used to exorcise the utterly fiendish moods of his brother, and he exhorts him to shake them aside when he is gone. Then follows the fine simile of

the lame boy, Balin, hopeless of ever attaining to the height of the peak, Lancelot,—a form of despair that has often paralysed human efforts that might, but for it, have been not in vain.

“But this worship of the Queen,  
That honour too wherein she holds him”—

it is these forces, thinks Balin, that have given Lancelot such combined energy and gentleness.

A like ideal reverence for Guinevere at first possesses Balin wholly ; and the moral tragedy of the *Idyll* lies in the shattering of this image in his heart. The revulsion of disbelief and loathing is as violent as the first passionate belief and reverence are strong.

Balin asks for a cognisance—an emblem to be borne on his shield—something that shall remind him of the Queen, and shall replace his old armorial bearings, which were some rough heraldic beast, with red tongue and snarling mouth. Arthur grants Balin the crown as an armorial bearing, although it will be only a shadow's shadow, the picture of a thing that is itself only the emblem of sovereignty (l. 200). But though Balin tries hard to conquer his evil moods, his heart has still its hours of darkness, and at such times the “kindly warmth of Arthur's court” fails to illuminate his mind, only gleaming fitfully and seeming to intensify his gloom ; there remains in the recesses of his mind a dismal region unlit by the reflected light of courtesy (ll. 226-234).

Lancelot's "Fain would I still be loyal to the Queen," line 249, has been already referred to as indicating the struggle between Love and Duty in his mind.

The "maiden Saint who stands with lily in hand," line 256, is a silver image of the Virgin Mary, that "female ideal, which acquired an irresistible fascination in the monastic life of celibacy and meditation, and in the strange mixture of gallantry and devotion that accompanied the Crusades."<sup>1</sup> Her emblem was the lily, which denoted spiritual purity. And

"All the light upon her silver face  
Flowed from the spiritual lily that she held."

So Ben Jonson calls the lily "the plant and flower of light"; and Hood speaks of

"The violets and the lily-cups,  
Those flowers made of light."

Malory's first detailed allusion to Lancelot's love for Guinevere is in Book VI. chap. iii., when four queens throw a spell over him. "And as we know well, there can no lady have thy love but one, and that is Queen Guenever, and now thou shalt lose her forever, and she thee, and therefore thee behoveth now to choose one of us four." Lancelot replies that he will "lever to die in this prison with worship, than to have one of you to my love maugre my head."

<sup>1</sup> See Lecky, *Rationalism*, i. 213, on the "salutary influence" of the mediæval conception of the Virgin, in elevating the position of women.

In the account that Malory gives of Lancelot's first meeting with Guinevere, he follows the old French romance of *Lancelot du Lac*, which tells "Comment Gallehaut fist tant que la royne vit lancelot et comment ils se arraisonerent ensemble."<sup>1</sup> As has already been pointed out in chapter iii., Tennyson seems to have himself devised the story of the bringing of Guinevere by Lancelot; and the Queen's words,

"Prince, we have ridden before among the flowers  
In those fair days,"

should be compared with the laureate's early poem on the subject, and with the *Coming of Arthur*, line 451; *Mertin and Vivien*, line 134; and *Guinevere*, line 377.

Line 295, "the viler devil who plays his part," refers to Garlon, who pretends to be a fiend of the woods. As a human being, acting so inhumanly, he is viler than the devil himself. The gift of invisibility is very often mentioned in the old myths, and often the man becomes invisible, but his weapon remains visible. So here the shadow of Garlon's spear is cast along the ground as it comes from behind Balin, and is seen in time for him to swerve aside and escape the blow (line 317).

The massive bronze goblet is embossed with two scenes from the legend of Joseph of Arimathea,—his voyage, and the little church he built at Glastonbury:

<sup>1</sup> *Lancelot of the Lake*, ed. Skeat. Early Eng. Text Soc. 1865, p. xxix. This Gallehaut, who is not to be confused with Lancelot's son, first brings Lancelot and Guinevere together.

a beautiful portrayal of the hardships and small beginnings of the early Church. With this we should compare the *Holy Grail*, lines 59-65.

In line 410 we have an Elizabethan word, *rummage*, confused noise, coupled with a very expressive adjective, "blindfold." For *rummage* compare *Hamlet*, I. i. 107: "This post-haste and romage in the land"; and also Drummond's sonnet (*Golden Treas.* I. xxxviii.): "And birds their ramage on thee did bestow."

Balin escapes from the pursuit, but his horse falls with him and he arises "half wroth he had not ended," that is, ended his life, been killed by the fall.

He gazes at his shield and reproaches himself for having shamed it by his violences; apparently his killing of Garlon was feloniously done, for Garlon was unarmed and unprepared.

"The wholesome music of the wood," the song of the birds, is dumb'd by the singing of Vivien as she rides along, like "some bird of prey" (*Pellwas*, l. 595). Her song is the song of animalism, the lust of the eyes, the world-war of the flesh against the soul of man. The poet depicts her as a woman in whom all the worse part of woman's nature has gained the upper hand: a false Duessa, minus some of the allegorical significance of Spenser's temptress; or rather a creature like those "fair atheists" whom the Archangel showed to Adam (*Par. Lost*, xi).—

"Empty of all good wherein consists  
Woman's domestic honour and chief praise."

Hence the ideals of purity in thought and word and deed that Arthur would have women and men alike conform themselves to are utterly hateful to her. The spirit of ascetic Christianity chills her nature, and she would gladly see "that old sun-worship" of Druidic times back again.

Human beings must yield to their desires, she sings; even the old monk and old nun in their frosty cells feel the fire of love. This warmth is natural to man: it is the true fire of Heaven, not, as asceticism asserts, the flame of Hell. Therefore follow Vivien through the fiery flood of sunny delights.

We need not trouble ourselves to defend monasticism against Vivien's philosophy of sensual enjoyment, for it was as a protest against such carnalism that the ascetic spirit first arose in the world.

Swift puts the case against asceticism more wittily than Vivien does. He says: "The stoical scheme of supplying our wants by lopping off our desires is like cutting off our feet when we want shoes."

And the true antithesis of asceticism is not pagan hedonism, but the modern industrial spirit; it is this that has tended most powerfully to destroy the old monastic doctrines of the sinfulness of the flesh and the vileness of fleshly joys. Mr. Lecky puts this matter plainly in his *Rationalism*, ii. 363:—

"What may be termed the ascetic and the industrial philosophies," he says, "have at all times formed two of the most important of the divisions of human



opinions; and as each brings with it a vast train of moral and intellectual consequences, their history touches almost every branch of intellectual progress. The watchword of the first philosophy is mortification; the watchword of the second is development. The first seeks to diminish, and the second to multiply, desires; the first, acknowledging happiness as a condition of the mind, endeavours to attain it by acting directly on the mind, the second by acting on surrounding circumstances. The first, giving a greater intensity to the emotions, produces the most devoted men; the second, regulating the combined action of society, produces the highest social level. The first has proved most congenial to the Asiatic and Egyptian civilisations; and the second to the civilisation of Europe."

May we not add that the first best suited mediæval circumstances, as the second best suits the conditions of modern European life?

Asceticism closed its eyes to the world that it might muse on purely spiritual joys; it had no sympathy with the Greek feeling of the worshipfulness of physical beauty, "noble and nude and antique."

Now Vivien's song, on the contrary, glorifies the least spiritual form of this heathenish worship of beauty—not intellectual or natural beauty, not Athene or Artemis, but the mere carnal delight, Aphrodite, "clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment, and fair as the foam."

In her better mood Vivien is only a Phryne, the

votaress of animal desire, who would "give license to pleasures and a voluptuous life"; in her worse she is a devil incarnate, the Belle Dame sans Merci of the *Idylls*.

Her utter pitilessness is shown in the scornful words with which she leaves the two fallen knights, "dead for one heifer," like brainless bulls.

The worship of the Semitic sun-god, Bel, was a part of Druidism, or at least of that Neo-Druidism of which we know little more than we do of the old Druidism, and in which Pythagorean and Christian doctrines were mingled with the Mithraic sun-worship of Persia. In *Boadicea* Tennyson gives us a glimpse of this Druidic cult. But very little is certainly known regarding the religion either of the British Druids, or of their Irish representatives the Brehons.

In line 479 Balin's title in the romance—Balin le Sauvage—is alluded to: savage among the savage woods.

The epithet "brainless" Tennyson uses of war also (*Princess*, v.); and the simile here may be compared with Malory (VI. viii.): "then they hurtled together as two wild bulls, rashing and lashing with their shields and swords that sometimes they fell both over their noses"; but there is a closer parallel in Spenser (*F. Q.* IV. iv. 18):—

"As two fierce buls, that strive the rule to get  
Of all the heard, meete with so hideous maine,  
That both rebutted tumble on the plaine;  
So these two Champions to the ground were feld."

In line 574 we have another Biblical reference: "for a living dog is better than a dead lion" (*Eccles.* ix. 4).

With Balin's last words before his death-drowsing eyes close—

"Good-night, true brother here! good-morrow there!"

compare Mrs. Barbauld's lines—

"Say not good-night,—but in some brighter clime  
Bid me good-morning."

## CHAPTER X

### MERLIN AND VIVIEN

THIS Idyll resembles the *Last Tournament* and *Guinevere*, inasmuch as that, while delineating character, and developing the spiritual conflict of the epic, it derives little more than a suggestion from the old romances. Malory simply tells how Merlin fell in a dotage about one of the damsels of the lake, whose name was Nimue.

“But Merlin would let her have no rest, but always he would be with her. And ever she made Merlin good cheer till she had learned of him all manner thing that she desired ; and he was assotted upon her that he might not be from her. So on a time he told King Arthur that he should not dure long, but should be put in the earth quick. . . . Ah, said the king, since ye know your adventure, purvey for it, and put away by your crafts that misadventure. Nay, said Merlin, it ~~wil~~ not be. So he departed from the king. And within a while the damsel of the lake departed, and

Merlin went with her wheresoever she went. And oft times Merlin would have had her privily away by his subtle crafts; then she made him to swear that he should never do none enchantment upon her if he would have his will. And so he sware; so she and Merlin went over the sea unto the land of Benwick. . . . Soon after the lady and Merlin departed, and by the way Merlin showed her many wonders, and came into Cornwall. And always Merlin lay about the lady to have her love, and she was passing weary of him, and fain would have been delivered of him, for she was afraid of him because he was a devil's son, and she could not put him away by no means. And so on a time it happed that Merlin showed to her in a rock whereas was a great wonder, and wrought by enchantment, that went under a great stone. So by her subtle working, she made Merlin go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there, but she wrought so there for him that he came never out for all the craft that he could do. And so she departed and left Merlin" (*Morte Darthur*, IV. i.)

In the foregoing account Cornwall seems to denote Cornouailles, a county of Lower Brittany. The satanic parentage of Merlin is alluded to by Tennyson in line 495.

Benwick or Benoye, the wick or town of King Ban, Lancelot's father, some men say is "Bayonne, and some call it Beaume, where the wine of Beaume is" (*Melory*, XX. xviii.), but wherever it may have been in reality,

the Arthurian legends require us to locate it in or near Brittany across the sea.<sup>1</sup>

The close of Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* should be compared with this Idyll, as it gives the third, or thorn-bush, variation of the disappearance of Merlin.

The "wild woods of Broceliande" are in Brittany, and the name of this forest, famed in magic story, has been explained in various ways. M. Pitré-Chevallier (*La Bretagne Ancienne*, p. 59) says that *Brékilien* (Broceliande, the modern Brecilien) is from two words, respectively signifying mountain, and closure or separation. Villemarqué derives it from \**Broc'hallean*, the wood of the nun, hermit, or anchorite (see *Mabinogion*, p. 75). He adds that the country around forms an immense amphitheatre, crowned with gloomy woods, called in Breton *Concoret* (Kun-koret, valley of druidesses), the *Val-des-Fées* of the mediæval romances. At one end of the plain a fountain flows, and near it stand two moss-covered stones, surmounted by a worm-eaten cross of wood. It is the fountain of Baranton and the tomb of Merlin. Lady Guest (p. 76) adds that "the Fountain of Baranton is supplied by a mineral spring, and it bubbles up on a piece of iron or copper being thrown into it. 'Les enfants s'amuse à y jeter des épingles, et disent par commun proverbe, *Ris donc, fontaine de Berculon, et je te donnerai une épingle.*'" Tennyson alludes to this in lines 426-430 :—

<sup>1</sup> May not Shakspeare have been thinking of this Beaume when he placed his Bohemia on the seashore?

"The fabry well  
That laughs at iron—as our warriors did --  
Where children cast their pins and nails, and cry  
'Laugh, little well !' but touch it with a sword,  
It buzzes fiercely round the point."<sup>1</sup>

Thus we find ourselves on "a coast of ancient fable and fear," in a region of glamour well suited for the tragic scene that is about to be enacted there.

A study of the first edition will show what extensive additions and alterations the poet has made to this Idyll. The account of Vivien, from line 6, "Whence came she?" to line 146, "Death in the living waters, and withdrawn," is not in the early editions. The editions of 1889 and 1892 vary from that of 1891; but until we have a critical text of the *Idylls* it will be impossible to trace perfectly the growth of the poem through its various stages of development to its final form.

The incident of the old minstrel at Mark's court may have been suggested by a passage in Malory (X. xxvii.), which describes how one Eliot, a harper, was taught by Sir Dinadan a lay abusing King Mark, and Eliot taught

<sup>1</sup> Villemarqué derives Baranton from *Belen* or *Bel*, the sun god, and *ton*, mountain, and he connects Baranton further with the Irish Saint Brandan; see *Myrdhin*, p. 132. The worship of fountains was common among the early Aryan nations, as an instance of which the Roman *Fontinalia* may be mentioned; and in Ireland and Brittany reverence is still paid to wells. May it not have originally been a part of the Asiatic serpent-worship? In the Kashmiri language *serp* still means a serpent, but *ndy*, the Indian word for a cobra, has come to mean in Kashmiri a fountain-head, the spring where the serpent-god dwells; and such *ndys* are holy places.

it to other harpers. And so by the will of Sir Lancelot these harpers went into Cornwall to sing that lay, which was, Malory adds, "the worst lay that ever harper sang with harp or with any other instruments."

In the thirty-first chapter we are told how King Mark heard this song, and how he charged the minstrel to hie fast out of his sight, and was wondrous angry against Tristram, whom he suspected of having instigated the insult.

Tennyson makes Mark feel anger, not at satire directed against himself, but at the garrulous old minstrel's account of the virgin purity of the Court of Arthur. Mark hates the "monkish manhood," and their spirit of asceticism, and takes counsel with Vivien how he and she may stir up the snakes, the latent evil passions, of this young knighthood.

The Scriptural allusions may be noted. "Neither marry nor are given in marriage," line 15, is from St. Matthew xxii. 30, or St. Mark xii. 25; and "As love if love be perfect casts out fear," line 40, is from 1 John iv. 18, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear."

The account of Vivien's birth in lines 42-46 should be compared with her different tale to Guinevere in lines 70-76. By "sown upon the wind" she means, left to chance.

Mark has taught her that goodness and purity are at bottom mud and filth. So Dagonet in the *Last Tournament* (line 297) finds that the wine of chivalry



has been drawn, and nothing but the dregs left: "Spat—pish—the cup was gold, the draught was mud."

Democritus said that Truth lay at the bottom of a well, from whence he had drawn her; and Tennyson gives an ingenious turn to this old figure, for the pure water is above and the mud at the bottom of the well (line 47).

The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose, and Mark asks his "cherub," Vivien, whether Holy Writ does not confirm him in saying "there is no being pure." The reference is to Job .xxv.: "Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm, and the son of man, which is a worm."

Vivien mocks even Mark, and asks that stainless king's blessing on her enterprise (line 54); perchance, if fate and craft concur, she says, she may even make a conquest of Arthur himself. So she departs, and we have already seen how she has fared on her journey.

Arrived at the Court, Vivien begins by flattering Guinevere, but to little purpose. She eyes Lancelot and the Queen as they ride a-hawking,—she means to fly at nobler game herself, for she thinks that flax will not burn more quickly than that too spiritual bond with which Arthur has bound his followers will give way. The "gray cricket" is that chirpy old minstrel before mentioned.

The comparison of herself to the

“Little rat that borest in the dyke  
Thy hole by night to let the boundless deep  
Down upon far-off cities while they dance—  
Or dream——”

may be illustrated by the following note of Pope's on the *Dunciad*, iii. 333: “Remember what the Dutch stories somewhere relate, that a great part of their provinces was once overflowed, by a small opening made in one of their dykes by a single rat.”

In the sad words—“The mortal dream that never yet was mine”—the poet lays bare the hearts of women such as Vivien (line 115); she has never loved; she can never know what love truly means.

In line 117 “lubber king” means foolish, stupid king; compare Milton's “lubber fiend” in *L'Allegro*.

The “terms of art”—technical terms of falconry—may be briefly explained:—

*Diet*, the feeding of the hawk; which was a very important matter in the proper management of hawks.

*Seeling*, partly sewing up the eyelids of a young hawk, to prevent it seeing men, etc., in front of it, and so becoming alarmed. Hoods came in time to be used instead of *seeling*.

*Jesses*, two narrow strips of leather, fastened one to each leg, and attached to a swivel, from which hung the *leash*, or thong.

*Laure*, sometimes a live pigeon, but more usually a piece of iron or wood, generally in the shape of a heart or a horse-shoe, to which were attached the wings of

some bird, with a piece of raw meat fixed between them. The falconer swung this round his head or threw it to a distance by a thong, and the hawk flew down to it.

"*She* is too noble": the *falcon* was the female; the *tercel* was the male, peregrine or goshawk.

*Cheek at pie*, either, leave pursuing a game-bird to follow a magpie that crosses her flight; or, as more usually, fly at worthless birds such as magpies.

*Towered*, rose spirally to a height.

*Pounced*, swooped down on her.

*Quarry*, the game flown at.

Her *bells* were globular, of brass or silver, and attached to each leg by "bewits."

The foregoing notes are almost verbatim from Mr. Harting's *Ornithology of Shakespeare*.

*To rake*, Halliwell (*Arch. Dict.*) explains to mean "fly wide at game."

Next we read that as Arthur leavened the world, spiritualised it by changing its nature in a noble direction, so Vivien leavened it, corrupted it by changing its nature in an ignoble direction. Compare Spenser, *F. Q.* VI. vii. 1.

*Leavened* is a word used in Scripture both literally of anything producing fermentation in dough, and metaphorically, as in "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. v. 6).

The time chosen for the working of Vivien's evil designs—a period of peace and slothful ease—is well

suites, for "quiet to quick bosoms is a hell" (*Childe H.* iii. 42). And having spread her rumours and lies she departs, not unwillingly, for her attempt to make love to Arthur has been seen, and has brought laughter upon her. But though she fails to move Arthur, the man of moral force, she succeeds in attracting the notice of Merlin, the man of intellectual power. The people call him wizard, devil's son; but Tennyson implies that he is only a man of intellect far in advance of his time—such men have been wizards and devils' sons in the estimate of the ignorant vulgar in all ages.

Merlin is attracted by her childlike ways, for he is alone in the world, old and unloved and uncaressed. But a great melancholy falls upon him, a dark presentiment of the impending ruin and chaos that will end all Arthur's noble dreams. He has also a foreboding of his own fate (see lines 292-302).

She goes with him in a little boat to the Breton strand. Need we ask

"What pilot so expert but needs must wreck,  
Embarked with such a steersmate at the helm?"

*Samson Agonistes.*

These little boats in the romances (compare *Holy Grail*) generally "ask no aid of sail or oar," and this one drives with "a sudden wind" across the deeps. Not a wind raised by enchantment; the poet does not directly say that; but there is just a subtle suggestion of glamour, of something more than natural, in this

sudden wind, which sustains the sense of spirit-daunting mystery. And as the Tennysonian Merlin is a man of supreme knowledge, but still only a man, the poet makes him feel a dull boding, a dark forethought "rolled about his brain" (line 228), instead of describing him as "seeing all his own mischance" like the Merlin of Malory, and the "seer in a trance" of the *Lady of Shalott*.

In line 215 we are told that Vivien fancies "her glory will be great according to his greatness whom she quenched"; somewhat similarly Blandamour, in the *Flourie Quenee*,

"Them fowle bespake,  
Disgracing them, himself thereby to grace,  
As was his wont." — IV. iv. 4.

And Byron (*Monody*) has the same thought :

"Folly loves the martyrdom of Fame."

The attire of Vivien is described (in lines 219-223) with a Shaksperian directness. We fancy we see the torque or fillet of gold in her hair, and the Cloan robe of samite, that "more exprest than hid" her lissome limbs, sheeny, like the glistening sallow-blooms in windy March.

The poet here paints with his usual minute truth to nature; for the *palm*, as the soft bloom of the great sallow is called in some districts, gleams with satiny sheen when blown by the March winds, those "blasts that blow the poplar white" (*In Mem.* 72).

The "blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall," line 230, describes the dull wave that sometimes moves slowly into a sea-cave, and winds along the ledges and crannies without breaking into foam.

In *The Brook* we have the phrase "lissome as a hazel-wand," which indicates the meaning of the adjective as it is applied to Vivien, to denote serpentine flexibility and grace.

The lissome damsel passes her pearly fingers through the *lists*, or edges, of the wizard's long beard (compare *white-listed*, line 936), and draws the "vast and shaggy mantle" round her, *clothing* herself, she says, with wisdom (line 253). Compare the description of a very different sort of lady, Godiva, in her flowing tresses, "clothed on with chastity."

Vivien compares herself to a gilded summer-fly caught in a spider's web (compare Spenser's 71st sonnet); but rather seemed, says the poet, a lovely *baleful* star, a star of pernicious influence or evil aspect, as it was called in the astrological language of old times.

In line 277 "sign of reverence" means venerable appearance—a goat, she says, with nothing but a long beard to give it a venerable appearance, would have returned no less thanks than long-bearded Merlin did. Merlin only nodded his head as a goat might have done.

Vivien asks her fatal boon that she may rest and let him rest, knowing him to be hers only. Compare Dalila's plea to Samson in *S. Agonistes*, 794.

Line 362, "in children a great curiousness be well,"

also recalls Dalila's excuse, that curiosity is a weakness "incident to all our sex" (*S. A. l.* 775).

Vivien's song is one of those quasi-rondels that the poet has introduced in several places. The general idea of the first stanza may be illustrated from *The Foresters*, p. 73:—

"What? to mistrust the girl you say you love  
Is to mistrust your own love for your girl!  
How should you love if you mistrust your love?"

The first four stanzas of Vivien's song are supposed to be sung by the lover; the fifth is the lady's answer. Vivien significantly says that she heard Lancelot singing this song.

The hunting of the hart with golden horns is a sort of fairy-tale incident that may have been suggested by the story of the white hart that came into the hall at Arthur's wedding feast, but the circumstances are dissimilar.

Men "never mount as high as woman in her selfless mood," line 440, may be compared with the lines in *Locksley Hall* upon the "chord of self," that "passed in music out of sight," when smitten by the hand of Love.

Vivien may enunciate the truth without fulfilling it herself: when a woman's heart is concerned deeply, she is capable of greater acts of devotion and self-sacrifice than a man is under the like circumstances.

Merlin alludes in line 811 to these words, and justly adds that women are either more wholly good or more wholly bad than men.

The "fancied arms" that the fair young squire has blazoned on his shield, line 472, may be described in unheraldic language as an eagle of gold soaring upon a blue surface to a golden sun depicted on the right hand of the upper part of the shield (*dexter*, *i.e.* on the left hand of any one *facing* the shield; the *right hand* of the bearer of the shield who is supposed to be sheltered behind it).

As the picture that Merlin substituted is blazoned *proper*, that is, in the natural colours of the objects represented, it is allowable in strict heraldry to place it upon a field azure, in spite of the fundamental heraldic law that forbids metal to be charged on metal or colour on colour.<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson's Merlin ascribes to Envy the name of Devil's son by which he has been called; the "sick weak beast," Envy, striving to wound him, did but wound her own heart instead.<sup>2</sup> The poet's forcible picture of Envy, hurting itself by the blow it aims at others, may be contrasted with Spenser's accumulation of detail in endeavouring to convey the same idea:—

"Malicious Envy rode

Upon a ravenous wolfe, and still did chaw  
Between his cankered teeth a venomous tode,  
That all the poison ran about his chaw;  
But inwardly he chawed his own maw

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<sup>1</sup> Cussans, *Handbook of Heraldry*, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> See Cox, *Introd. Compar. Mythol.* p. 339, *n.*; and Spenser, *F. Q.* III. iii. 13.



At neighbours wealth, that made him ever sad,  
 For death it was when any goode he saw ;  
 And wept, that cause of weeping none he had ;  
 But when he heard of harme, he wexed wondrous glad."

*R. Q., l. iv. 30.*

The *belt of three stars*, line 508, is that part of the constellation of Orion called Orion's belt.

In the "sons of kings," loving when in pupilage, line 515, there is possibly a reference in particular to the story of Dionysius the Second, Tyrant of Syracuse; but, if so, the blame of failure in his case must be partly at least laid to the charge of his unpractical teachers, Dion and Plato.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the king in the most Eastern East, line 553, is a sort of imaginary recollection of the Arabian Nights; and the little glassy-headed wizard, whose skin "clung but to crate and basket, ribs and spine," recalls Spenser's "aged holy man"—

"Each bone might through his body well be red,  
 And every sinewe scene, through his long fast."

*l. x. 48.*

With the description, lines 564-577, of the maid who was so beautiful that "they said a light came from her," and camels and elephants bowed before her, we

<sup>1</sup> See Grote, chap. lxxxiv., and compare Swift's saying: "Princes in their infancy, childhood, and youth, are said to discover prodigious parts and wit, to speak things that surprise and astonish: strange, so many hopeful princes, so many shameful kings! If they happen to die young, they would have been prodigies of wisdom and virtue; if they live, they are often prodigies indeed, but of another sort."

may compare the strikingly similar picture of Shelley's *Witch of Atlas*. See stanzas 5 to 13 and 28 in particular. A few lines may be quoted :—

5. "A lovely lady—garmented in light '  
From her own beauty . . .  
. . . her soft smiles shone afar,  
And her low voice was heard like love, and drew  
All living things towards this wonder new."

6. "And first the spotted cameleopard came,  
And then the wise and fearless elephant ;  
Then the sly serpent, in the golden flame  
Of his own volumes intervolved—all gaunt  
And sanguine beasts her gentle looks made tame.

28. "This lady never slept, but lay in trance  
All night within the fountain as in sleep."

We may also compare Vivien's robe of samite, "that more exprest than hid her," with stanza 64 of the same poem :—

"The diaphanous  
Veils, in which those sweet ladies oft array  
Their delicate limbs, who would conceal from us  
Only their scorn of all concealment."

Once more, in *Lancelot and Elaine*, l. 1395, we are told that the Lady of the Lake

"Chanted snatches of mysterious hymns  
Heard on the winding waters,"

which seems to echo stanza 56—

"And mystic snatches of harmonious sound  
Wandered upon the earth where'er she past."

Tennyson seems to have coincided rather closely in thought with Shelley in the foregoing passages, but much stress should not be laid on resemblances that may be purely accidental, and that seem much less close when taken with their contexts.

The words "magnet-like she drew the rustiest iron of old fighters' hearts" have a suggestion of Sindbad's magnet-mountain about them.

Curiously enough, Vivien's criticism in line 601, "the lady never made *unwilling* war with those fine eyes," exactly parallels the remark made to Dr. Johnson by a lady "of great beauty and excellence," after reading the fourth line of Pope's epitaph on Mrs. Corbet. The line in question states that Mrs. Corbet "no arts essayed but not to be admired"; and the lady considered that it contained "an unnatural and incredible panegyric." In fact, Mrs. Corbet never made unwilling war with those fine eyes! "of this," adds the doctor, "let the ladies judge."

Vivien threatens that she will get the wizard's book, even though Merlin keep it "like a puzzle, chest in chest" (l. 652); an allusion to those Chinese puzzles of "laborious orient ivory sphere in sphere" that are referred to in the prologue to the *Princess*.

The description of the magic book, with its margins "scribbled, crossed, and crammed with comment," might serve for many an old Arabic or Persian manuscript. And compare Juvenal, i. 5.

*Reckling*, in line 707, is a north-country word meaning

the smallest and weakest in a brood of animals (Halliwell, *Arch. Dict.*); hence here it denotes the helpless little babe.

There is no trace in Malory of Vivien's slanderous stories about Sir Valence and Sir Sagamore; but the account of Percivale "flustered with new wine" is based on an incident in the *Morte Darthur*, XIV. ix., when Percivale "drank there the strongest wine that ever he drank, him thought, and therewith he was a little heated more than he ought to be"; but Malory represents him as escaping from the wiles of the tempting fiend when he sees the red cross and crucifix in the pommel of his sword.

The description of slander in line 726, "That foul bird of rapine whose whole prey is man's good name," may be compared with Shakspeare's in Sonnet lxx.—

"The ornament of beauty is suspect,  
A crow that flies in heaven's sweetest air."

Spenser personifies Slander and Detraction in *F. Q.*, IV. viii. 35, and V. xii. 33. The "holy king," line 763, is David; see 2 Samuel, xi. xii. Note the use of *fancy*, line 775, and *wink*, line 779, in their older meanings respectively of "love" and "shut the eyes."

The forcible description of Merlin's frown, dragging his eyebrows down, line 805, is likened by Mr. Collins to the Homeric

"And down are drawn  
Covering his eyes, the wrinkles of his brow."  
*Il.* xvii. 136, tr. LORD DERBY.

With the lines on slanderous women compare *The Letters* :—

“Thro’ slander, meanest spawn of Hell,  
And women’s slander is the worst.”

Merlin’s musing words (l. 821)—

“Nine fifties of times  
Face-flatterer and backbiter are the same.”—

render epigrammatically a couplet in the old *Misfortunes of Arthur* :—

“Dame Flattery flitteth oft ; she loves and hates  
With time, a present friend, an absent foe.”

DODSLEY, *O. P.* iv. 276.

Vivien imputes “her whole self,” all her own baseness of nature, defaming and defacing all (l. 801), which Merlin detects and reproves :—

“And they, sweet soul, that most impute a crime  
Are pronest to it, and impute themselves,  
Wanting the mental range.” (l. 821)

a thought that recalls Wordsworth’s

“Minds that have nothing to confer  
Find little to perceive,”

and more closely, Tennyson’s own words in *Pelleas and Ettarre*—

“The base man, judging of the good,  
Puts his own baseness in him by default  
Of will and nature.”

Such narrow minds, Merlin tells us,

“Would pare the mountain to the plain  
To leave an equal baseness” (l. 827),

like the radical-reforming Giant in the *Faerie Queene* (V. ii. 38), who says—

“Therefore I will throw down these mountaines lie,  
And make them leuell with the lowly plaine,  
These tow’ring rockes, that reach unto the skie,  
I will thrust downe into the deepest maine,  
And as they were, them equalize againe.”

This is what Selden (*Table Talk*) calls “the juggling trick of the Parity; they would have nobody above them; but they do not tell you that they would have nobody under them” (p. 80, ed. 1716).

The bare-grinning skeleton of death, flashing from Vivien’s rosy lips, indicates the change that is wrought in a countenance moved by evil passions; and the transformation is instantaneous—

“For in a wink the false love turns to hate.”

Both Spenser and Milton give expression to the same idea. The former says, “Such love is hate, and such desire is shame” (*F. Q.*, III. i. 50), and again, “Faint friends when they fall out most cruell foemen be” (IV. ix. 27; cf. IV. x. 32); and Milton places the “hill of scandal, by the grove of Moloch homicide, lust hard by hate” (*Par. Lost*, i. 416). Still closer are Dalila’s words to Samson:—

“And what if love, which thou interpret’st hate,  
 The jealousy of love, powerful of sway  
 In human hearts, nor less in mine to thee,  
 Caused what I did?”—*Samson Agon.* 790.

There are some remarkable coincidences of thought and expression between *Samson Agonistes* and this Idyll of *Merlin and Vivien*, dealing as they both do with the theme that

“Wisest men  
 Have erred, and been by bad women deceived,  
 And shall again, pretend they ne’er so wise.”

*Samson Agon.* 210.

Especially compare the last scene of all, where, like Samson, “over-watched and wearied out,” Merlin, “over-talked and overworn,”

“Yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.”

Samson reiterates the word “Fool!” of himself, lines 201-204, as Vivien does of Merlin. In lines 392-407 he describes his traitress’s victory:—

“Thrice she assayed, with flattering prayers and sighs,  
 And amorous reproaches, to win from me  
 My capital secret, in what part my strength  
 Lay stored, in what part summ’d, that she might know;  
 Thrice I deluded her, and turned to sport  
 Her importunity, each time perceiving  
 How openly and with what impudence  
 She purposed to betray me, and (which was worse  
 Than undissembled hate) with what contempt  
 She sought to make me traitor to myself.

---

Yet the fourth time, when, mustering all her wiles,  
With blandished parleys, feminine assaults,  
Tongue batteries, she surceased not day nor night  
To storm me, over-watched and wearied out,  
At times when men seek most their natural rest,  
I yielded, and unlocked her all my heart."

As we listen to the words we almost deem that it is  
not the Judge in Israel who speaks, but the spell-bound  
Mage within his prison-oak, deprived of use and name  
and fame for evermore.



## CHAPTER XI

### LANCELOT AND ELAINE

THIS is perhaps the most idyllic of the Idylls—and it is in some respects the most touching, as a picture of Elaine's love, "that never found its mortal close," and Lancelot's great and guilty passion, that "marred his face and marked it ere his time." Tennyson's power of drawing the characters of simple and lovable women is here seen to perfection. It is easy enough to represent a woman in whom the elements of good and evil are mingled, or in whom the latter predominate,—such a character is in no danger of being too neutral-tinted or monotonous; but it is a far harder task to depict women like Enid and Elaine, fair and lovable beings, with all the charm of purity and goodness, but moving steadfastly within the orbit of homely simple duties, and lacking the effect of deviation, the contrast of light and shade, that we see in the lives of less clear-natured women. In delineating these gracious creatures Tennyson stands unrivalled; and in his rare sympathy with such types of womanly purity

we may perceive the almost feminine delicacy of his mind.

The outline of the story of Elaine is taken from the eighteenth book of the *Morte Darthur*, chapters viii. to xxi. ; and the poet has followed Malory closely in many passages.

The story opens, as that of Geraint does, *in medias res*. Elaine is living alone in fantasy,

“Easing her love-laden  
Soul in secret bower,”

with dreams of the noble champion whose shield has been entrusted to her care. The poet then gives the history of the nine diamonds, the “nine years’ proof” of the most valiant. Eight years have past, and Lancelot has eight times been the winner of the prize; the ninth diamond remains to be won, but he, “love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen,” fancies that her eyes bid him stay with her, and he tells Arthur that he will not joust, as his “ancient wound” is hardly healed.

“So King Arthur made him ready to depart to those jousts, and would have had the Queen with him; but at that time she would not, she said, for she was sick, and might not ride at that time. . . . And many deemed the Queen would not be there because of Sir Launcelot du Lake, for Sir Launcelot would not ride with the King; for he said that he was not whole of the wound the which Sir Mador had given him. Wherefore the King was heavy and passing wroth,” etc. (XVIII. viii.)

The Queen's words to Lancelot may be quoted from the Idyll to illustrate how closely Tennyson's treatment of the subject sometimes approaches Malory's :--

"To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame !  
Why go ye not to these fair jousts ? the knights  
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd  
Will murmur, ' Lo the shameless ones, who take  
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone ! ' "

"Sir Launcelet, ye are greatly to blame, thus to hold you behind my lord ; what trow ye, what will your enemies and mine say and deem ? Nought else but See how Sir Launcelet holdeth him ever behind the King, and so doth the Queen, for that they would be together : and thus they will say, said the Queen to Launcelet, have ye no doubt thereof" (XVIII. viii.) Notice, too, the different turn that is given to "Madam, said Sir Launcelet, I allow your wit, it is of late come sin ye were wise" (ix.) in Tennyson's

"Are ye so wise ? ye were not once so wise,  
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first."

The remainder of their conversation of course owes nothing to the Romance.

Arthur meantime has reached Astolat, "that is Gylford." Sir Lancelot arrives there soon after, and goes to "an old baron's place, that hight Sir Bernard of Astolat." The baron does not recognise his guest, and when he asks his name, Lancelot replies that he will tell it at a later time. In Malory there is no mention

in this place of the wordless servitor—old, ~~dumb~~, myriad-wrinkled—who is such a striking figure in Tennyson's picture;<sup>1</sup> and except the refusal to tell his name then (l. 190), nothing of the conversation in the baron's hall, when Lancelot tells them of Arthur and his battles (ll. 168-353). In Malory's story, Arthur perceives Lancelot walking in the castle garden, but does not reveal his discovery to the courtiers, although he says to them that he knows of one good knight at least who will fight.

Lancelot's asking for the loan of the shield, the mention of Torre's wound, and the offer of Lavaine's company, are from chapter ix. Also the following:—

"This old baron had a daughter that time that was called that time the fair maid of Astolat. And ever she beheld Sir Launcelot wonderfully. And, as the book saith, she cast such a love unto Sir Launcelot that she could never withdraw her love, wherefore she died; and her name was Elaine le Blank. So thus as she came to and fro, she was so hot in her love that she besought Sir Launcelot to wear upon him at the justs a token of hers. Fair damsel, said Sir Launcelot, and if I grant you that, ye may say I do more for your love than ever I did for lady or damsel. Then he remembered him that he would go to the justs disguised, and for because he had never afore that time borne no manner of token of no damsel, then he be-thought him that he would bear one of her, that none of his blood thereby might know him. And then he said, Fair maiden, I will grant you to wear a token of yours upon my helmet, and therefore what it is shew it me. Sir, she said, it is a red sleeve

<sup>1</sup> Malory in chap. xx. says that the man in the barge *would not* speak—not that he *could not*.

of mine, of scarlet well embroidered with great pearls. And so she brought it him. So Sir Launcelet received it and said, Never did I erst so much for no damsel. And then Sir Launcelet betook the fair maiden his shield in keeping, and prayed her to keep that until that he came again. And so that night he had merry rest and great cheer. For ever the damsel Elaine was about Sir Launcelet, all the while she might be suffered." (XVIII. ix.)

Elaine's request that the knight should wear her token Malory puts near the time of Launcelet's arrival at the castle; Tennyson more fittingly represents it as being made just before the departure of the warriors:—

"She braved a riotous heart in asking for it,  
'Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,  
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear  
My favour at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he,  
'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn  
Favour of any lady in the lists.  
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'  
'Yea, so,' she answer'd; 'then in wearing mine  
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,  
That those who know should know you.' And he turn'd  
Her counsel up and down within his mind,  
And found it true, and answer'd, 'True, my child.  
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:  
What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve  
Broider'd with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound  
Her token on his helmet, with a smile  
Saying, 'I never yet have done so much  
For any maiden living,' and the blood  
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight" (ll. 355-374).

We again lose sight of Malory in lines 375-450, for

even the hermit-knight mentioned in line 400 is in the old story a "rich burgess," with whom Lancelot and Lavaine are "lodged privily" (x.)

During the tourney Lancelot does such marvellous deeds that Gawain asks Arthur who he is. "I wot what he is, said King Arthur, but as at this time I will not name him." Gawain "would say it is Sir Lancelot," but the red sleeve makes him doubt, for Lancelot has never before borne any token of "lady nor gentlewoman." Compare lines 467-472: "and one said to the other, Lo!" etc.

The combined attack on Lancelot is finely retold, and the great simile of the "wild wave in the wide North Sea" is added by the poet.

Tennyson also delineates the different characters of Torre and Lavaine very clearly; Malory does little more than name the former, but describes the actions of the latter, and the aid he renders to Lancelot, much as the poet tells the tale:—

"O gentle knight Sir Lavaine, help me that this truncheon were out of my side, for it sticketh so sore that it nigh slayeth me. O mine own lord, said Sir Lavaine, I would fain do that might please you, but I dread me sore, and I draw out the truncheon, that ye shall be in peril of death. I charge you, said Sir Launcelot, as ye love me draw it out. And therewithal he descended from his horse, and right so did Sir Lavaine, and forthwith Sir Lavaine drew the truncheon out of his side. And he gave a great shriek, and a marvellous grisly groan, and his blood brast out nigh a pint at once, that at last he sank down, and so swooned pale and deadly."

When Lancelot revives a little, they ride "two mile" to

"A gentle hermit, that sometime was a full noble knight and a great lord of possessions : and for great goodness he hath taken him to wilful poverty, and forsaken many lands, and his name is Sir Baudewin of Brittany, and he is a full noble surgeon, and a good leech" (xii.)

Tennyson says that this hermit-knight

"Ever labouring had scoop'd himself  
In the white rock a chapel and a hall  
On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,  
And cells and chambers," etc. (ll. 401-409).

This is a characteristic elaboration of Malory's simple picture of "that hermitage, which was under a wood, and a great cliff on the other side, and a fair water running under it."

. Now, as the old story would say, turn we unto King Arthur, and leave we Sir Lancelot in the hands of the hermit-leech, and tended by Lavaine. Arthur at the feast after the tournament asks for the "knight that bare the red sleeve:—Bring him to me that he may have his land and honour and the prize, as it is right."

The knights of the unknown victor's party reply : "We suppose that he is mischieved, and that he is never like to see you, nor none of us all." Arthur asks them his name, but they do not know it, nor whence he comes ; the King laments greatly : not for all his lands would he that that knight were slain. "Know ye him ? said they all." Arthur refuses to tell ; and

Sir Gawain offers to find him if he may be found. So Gawain seeks all round the vicinity of Camelot, but in vain. The King and his fellowship depart for London, and as they ride by the way, it happens that Gawain lodges at that baron's castle at Astolat. He tells them of the tournament, and of the deeds of the unknown knight with the red sleeve.

"Now blessed be God, said the fair maiden of Astolat, that that knight sped so well, for he is the man in the world that I first loved, and truly he shall be the last that ever I shall love. Now fair maid, said Sir Gawaine, is that good knight your love? Certainly, sir, said she, wit ye well he is my love. Then know ye his name, said Sir Gawaine. Nay, truly, said the damsel, I know not his name, nor from whence he cometh, but to say that I love him, I promise you and God that I love him. How had ye knowledge of him first? said Sir Gawaine."

The shield of the knight is in the maiden's chamber "covered with a case"—these words are the tiny germ that Tennyson has developed into the beautiful descriptive fantasy at the opening of the *Idyll*—and Gawain is heavy of heart when he recognises Lancelot's arms.

"Ah, mercy, said Sir Gawaine, now is my heart more heavier than ever it was tofore. Why? said Elaine. For I have great cause, said Sir Gawaine: is that knight that owneth this shield your love? Yea truly, said she, my love he is, God would I were his love. Truly, said Sir Gawaine, fair damsel, ye have right, for, and he be your love, ye love the most honourable knight of the world, and the man of most worship. So me thought ever, said the damsel, for never, or that time, for no knight that ever I saw loved I never none erst. God grant,



said Sir Gawaine, that either of you may rejoice other, but that is in a great adventure. But truly, said Sir Gawaine unto the damsel, ye may say ye have a fair grace, for why, I have known that noble knight this four and twenty year, and never or that day I nor none other knight, I dare make it good, saw nor heard say that ever he bare token or sign of no lady, gentlewoman, nor maiden, at no justs nor tournament. And therefore, fair maiden, said Sir Gawaine, ye are much beholden to him to give him thanks. But I dread me, said Sir Gawaine, that ye shall never see him in this world, and that is great pity that ever was of earthly knight. Alas, said she, how may this be? Is he slain? I say not so, said Sir Gawaine, but wit ye well, he is grievously wounded, by all manner of signs, and by men's sight more likely to be dead then to be on live; and wit ye well he is the noble knight Sir Launcelot, for by this shield I know him. Alas, said the fair maiden of Astolat, how may this be, and what was his hurt? Truly, said Sir Gawaine, the man in the world that loved him best hurt him so, and I dare say, said Sir Gawaine, and that knight that hurt him knew the very certainty that he had hurt Sir Launcelot, it would be the most sorrow that ever came to his heart. Now, fair father, said then Elaine, I require you give me leave to ride and to seek him, or else I wot well I shall go out of my mind, for I shall never stint till that I find him and my brother Sir Lavaine. Do as it liketh you, said her father, for me right sore repenteth of the hurt of that noble knight. Right so the maid made her ready, and before Sir Gawaine making great dole. Then on the morn Sir Gawaine came to king Arthur, and told him how he had found Sir Launcelot's shield in the keeping of the fair maiden of Astolat. All that knew I aforehand, said king Arthur, and that caused me I would not suffer you to have ado at the great justs: for I espied, said king Arthur, when he came in till his lodging, full late in the evening in Astolat. But marvel have I, said Arthur, that ever he would bear any sign of any damsel: for, or now, I never heard say nor knew

that ever he bare any token of none earthly woman. By my head, said Sir Gawaine, the fair maiden of Astolat loveth him marvellously well ; what it meaneth I cannot say ; and she is ridden after to seek him. So the king and all came to London, and there Sir Gawaine openly disclosed to all the court that it was Sir Launcelot that justed best" (XVIII. xiv.)

It will be seen that we have here none of that "touch of traitor" (line 634 ; compare *Pelleas*, line 352) in Gawain's courtesy that in the Idyll marks him in his "free flashes," and still more in the hardily-veiled suggestion of a future intrigue :—

" Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two  
May meet at court hereafter: there, I think,  
So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,  
We two shall know each other " (ll. 692-695).

Except that Queen Guinevere was "nigh out of her mind with wrath," and called Lancelot "a false traitor knight" (compare line 607), there is not much from this on to connect the Idyll with the Romance, until we come to the question of Lavaine, "Who told you, sister, that my lord's name was Launcelot," and the scene at the hermitage :—

" And when she saw him lie so sick and pale in his bed, she might not speak, but suddenly she fell to the earth down suddenly in a swoon, and there she lay a great while. And when she was relieved she sighed and said, My lord Sir Launcelot, alas, why be ye in this plight ? and then she swooned again. And then Sir Launcelot prayed Sir Lavaine to take her up,—And bring her to me. And when she came to herself, Sir Launcelot kissed her, and said, Fair maiden, why fare ye thus ? Ye put

me to pain ; wherefore make ye no more such cheer, for, and ye be come to comfort me, ye be right welcome, and of this little hurt that I have, I shall be right hastily whole, by the grace of God. But I marvel, said Sir Launcelot, who told you my name."

She tells of Gawain's visit, and Lancelot says that he regrets that his name is known, for he is sure it will turn to anger.

"And then Sir Launcelot compassed in his mind that Sir Gawaine would tell Queen Guenever how he bare the red sleeve, and for whom, that he wist well would turn unto great anger.

"So this maiden, Elaine, never went from Sir Launcelot, but watched him day and night, and did such attendance to him that the French book saith there was never woman did more kindlier for man than she" (xv.)

Tennyson, perhaps with needless attention to the proprieties, makes Elaine go every night to the house of her kinsfolk, and return in the morning to her brother and Sir Lancelot at the hermitage. So the days pass, and Sir Bors, who has been sent by Guinevere to seek out tidings of Lancelot, is met by Lavaine and brought to the hermitage. A long conversation ensues about the Queen's wrath, and the red sleeve, and the damsel "that is so busy" about the wounded knight. Lancelot says that he cannot put her away from him.

"Why should ye put her from you? said Sir Bors, she is a passing fair damsel, and a well beseen and well taught; and God would, fair cousin, said Sir Bors, that ye could love her, but as to that I may not, nor I dare not, counsel you" (xvi.)

Passing over two chapters in the Romance, we come to the nineteenth, in which Elaine confesses her love :—

“My lord Sir Launcelot, now I see ye will depart, now, fair knight and courteous knight, have mercy upon me, and suffer me not to die for thy love. What would ye that I did? said Sir Launcelot. I would have you to my husband, said Elaine. Fair damsel, I thank you, said Sir Launcelot, but truly, said he, I cast me never to be wedded man. Then, fair knight, said she, will ye be my love? Jesu defend me, said Sir Launcelot, for then I rewarded to your father and your brother full evil for their great goodness. Alas, said she, then must I die for your love. Ye shall not so, said Sir Launcelot, for wit ye well, fair maiden, I might have been married and I had would, but I never applied me to be married yet. But because, fair damsel, that ye love me as ye say ye do, I will, for your good will and kindness, shew you some goodness, and that is this; that wheresoever ye will beset your heart upon some good knight that will wed you, I shall give you together a thousand pound yearly, to you and to your heirs. Thus much will I give you, fair maiden, for your kindness, and always while I live to be your own knight. Of all this, said the maiden, I will none, for, but if ye will wed me, or else be my lover, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, my good days are done. Fair damsel, said Sir Launcelot, of these two things ye must pardon me. Then she shrieked shrilly, and fell down in a swoon.”

Malory makes no mention of the “one discourtesy” that Lancelot uses in the Idyll.

From line 956, “While he spoke, She neither blush’d nor shook,” to line 1090, where she bids them call the ghostly man, the poet owes nothing to the *Morte Darthur*; but from that onward, the dying girl’s shrift,

her request about the barget, and her death, closely follow the old narrative.

Then we come to the Queen's jealous anger, lines 1169-1230, a scene that may have derived some touches from the first and second chapters of Malory's eighteenth book, although the circumstances are different. Some passages from these chapters will be quoted subsequently.

There is a grim irony of fate in the fulfilment of Elaine's dream when the Queen in jealous wrath flings the diamonds into the river. The barge is approaching, and the vanished gems become an offering to the spirit of the dead maiden.

In the Romance it is Arthur, not Lancelot, who is speaking to Guinevere at the window when the black barget comes in view. The lily, needless emblem of purity, in Elaine's hand, and the shield-cover with Lancelot's lions brodered on it, are details that the poet has added to the picture. From the reading of the letter on may be quoted :—

“And this was the intent of the letter : - Most noble knight, Sir Launcelot, now hath death made us two at debate for your love ; I was your lover, that men called the fair maiden of Astolat ; therefore unto all ladies I make my moan ; yet pray for my soul, and bury me at the least, and offer ye my mass-penny. This is my last request. And a clean maiden I died, I take God to witness. Pray for my soul, Sir Launcelot, as thou art peerless.--This was all the substance in the letter. And when it was read, the king, the queen, and all the knights wept for pity of the doleful complaints. Then was Sir Launcelot sent

for. And when he was come, king Arthur made the letter to be read to him; and when Sir Launcelot heard it word by word, he said, My lord Arthur, wit ye well I am right heavy of the death of this fair damsel. God knoweth I was never causer of her death by my willing, and that will I report me to her own brother; here he is, Sir Lavaine. I will not say nay, said Sir Launcelot, but that she was both fair and good, and much I was beholden unto her, but she loved me out of measure. Ye might have shewed her, said the queen, some bounty and gentleness, that might have preserved her life. Madam, said Sir Launcelot, she would none other way be answered, but that she would be my wife, or else my love, and of these two I would not grant her; but I proffered her, for her good love that she shewed me, a thousand pound yearly to her and to her heirs, and to wed any manner knight that she could find best to love in her heart. For, madam, said Sir Launcelot, I love not to be constrained to love; for love must arise of the heart, and not by no constraint. That is truth, said the king, and many knights: love is free in himself, and never will be bounden; for where he is bounden he loseth himself. Then said the king unto Sir Launcelot, It will be your worship that ye oversee that she be interred worshipfully. Sir, said Sir Launcelot, that shall be done as I can best devise. And so many knights went thither to behold that fair maiden. And so upon the morn she was interred richly, and Sir Launcelot offered her mass-penny, and all the knights of the Table Round that were there at that time offered with Sir Launcelot. And then the poor man went again with the barget. Then the queen sent for Sir Launcelot, and prayed him of mercy, for why she had been wroth with him causeless. This is not the first time, said Sir Launcelot, that ye have been displeased with me causeless; but, madam, ever I must suffer you, but what sorrow I endure I take no force" (XVIII. xx.)

In this Idyll we again see how closely Tennyson follows the original story at times, while keeping ever

in view and developing simultaneously what may be called the moral under-plot that he has grafted upon the old legends. Regarding the growth of this under-plot, the "rift within the lute" that will soon dumb the music of Arthur's chivalry, something may now be said.

In the introductory Idyll we are shown the court of Arthur at a time when hope and enthusiasm were at their highest. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive," and the work of consolidating Arthur's kingdom kept the knights from thoughts of evil.

In *Gareth and Lynette* the knight-hood are still pure, but the guilty love of Lancelot and the Queen has begun.

In the *Maid* Idylls the taint is seen to be spreading—and "mainly through that sully of the queen." A time of slothful ease begins to sap the energies of the knights, and Vivien appears—she would have been impossible at an earlier time. Leaving her poison in the living waters of the court, she departs for a time, destroying Merlin as she goes. The establishment of formal courtesy, a respect for the *convenances* of society, instead of the purer regard for "truth in scorn of consequence" that Arthur loved, is indicated in the character of Gawain—son of Lot, a rebellious king, and brother of Modred, a traitor at heart.

There is more than a *touch* of traitor in Gawain's courtly graces—he is the type of those pests of society who hold that the sole sinfulness of seduction consists in being found out; and Tennyson reminds us of this

again both in the *Grail* and in *Pelleas and Ettarre*, when Gawain is mentioned.

As we proceed farther in the poem we shall see that the Grail quest is but the untimely madness of an hour—it gives but a temporary check to the disintegrating forces of lust and ambition; and when it fails, these forces bear onward with redoubled power; at last Modred's day will be at hand, and the great order will be swept away in tears and blood.

From Tennyson's early Arthurian ballads of Sir Galahad, Lancelot and Guinevere, and the Lady of Shalott, it would seem that he originally meditated a somewhat freer treatment of the subject than he has actually adopted in the *Idylls*. The *Lady of Shalott* is grounded upon the story in the metrical romance of the *Morte Arthur*, in which Astolat is called Ascalot, whence the form Shalott; but Tennyson's poem is merely an imaginative fantasy on the theme, and not a transcript of the legend.

The "Lily Maid" is called "Elaine le Blank," the white Elaine, in Malory; and Astolat is said to be now called Gilford. Knights usually kept their shields covered, to prevent "rust and soilure," and doubtless many a fair damsel wrought, as did Elaine, a cover for her warrior's shield.

The yellow throat of the callow "nestling in the nest" is an instance of the poet's accurate observation of the small details of nature.



The story of the "two brothers, one a king," line 39, is alluded to again in the *Last Tournament*, line 47, where the innocent babe's jewels are contrasted with those taken from the "skeleton of a brother-slayer."

"The place which now is this world's hugest," line 75, is London.

Guinevere's scorn for Arthur's

"Swearing men to vows impossible  
To make them like himself,"

recalls similar passages in *Gareth*, line 267, where Merlin calls them

"Such vows as is a shame  
A man should not be bound by, yet the which  
No man can keep";

and the *Last Tournament*, line 652, where Tristram's vow of knighthood has taught him that such strict vows snap themselves,—

"Ay, being snapt  
We run more counter to the soul thereof  
Than had we never sworn."

In Guinevere's

"He is all fault who hath no fault at all,"

we see that Arthur appears to her as Maud did at first to her lover—

"Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,  
Dead perfection, no more."

Guinevere cannot love such dead perfection; for the

man who loves her "must have a touch of earth." The sun in high heaven is mere white light: "the low sun makes the colour"—such a glory as the "low sea sunset" made round the hair and glossy-throated grace of Queen Isolt (*Last Tournament*, l. 506).

Shakspeare speaks of "simple truth miscalled simplicity" as one of the disjointed things of this world that make him weary of life: Arthur's simple truth, simplicity as it seems to Guinevere, makes her despise him as "a moral child without the craft to rule."

The woman who sins is never without some flattering unction to palliate her folly, and this is Guinevere's: Arthur would not have lost her if he had had that touch of earth, the craft to rule her, instead of trusting her to steer a straight course by herself.

In line 179 we have a Virgilian expression translated literally: by what name livest thou between the lips.

The description of Lancelot in lines 243-257 is very noteworthy; how the great and noble soul at war within itself has "marred his face and marked it ere his time." His distracted mood at times almost overwhelms his passion for Guinevere; for the man's heart may be maddened with remorse. Yet,

"Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man  
That ever among ladies ate in hall" (l. 252).

These words contain a reminiscence of Sir Ector's words in XXI. xiii. when Lancelot is dead:—

"Ah, Lancelot, he said, thou were head of all christian knights ; and now I dare say, said Sir Ector, thou Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand ; and thou were the courtiest knight that ever bare shield ; and thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse ; and thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman ; and thou were the kindest man that ever strake with sword ; and thou were the goodliest person ever came among press of knights ; and thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies ; and thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest."

The "smaller time," line 262, is of course our own day. Compare Gareth's "lesser spear."

The list of Arthur's twelve great battles, given by Lancelot in lines 277-315, is first found in Nennius, whom Tennyson follows:—"Then it was that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons. And though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander, and was as often conqueror. The first battle in which he was engaged, was at the mouth of the river Gleni. The second, third, fourth, and fifth, were on another river, by the Britons called Douglas, in the region Linus. The sixth, on the river Bassas. The seventh in the wood Celidon, which the Britons call Cat Coit Celidon. The eighth was near Gurnion Castle, where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his shoulders, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the

holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight, and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter. The ninth was at the City of Legion, which is called Caer Leon. The tenth was on the banks of the river Trat Treuroit. The eleventh was on the mountain Breguoin, which we call Cat Bregon. The twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon. In this engagement, nine hundred and forty fell by his hand alone, no one but the Lord affording him assistance. In all these engagements the Britons were successful. For no strength can avail against the will of the Almighty" (Nennius, in Bohn's *Six Chronicles*, p. 408).

From the foregoing account it would seem as though Arthur had borne a sacred image on his shoulder during the battle of Castle Gurnion. Geoffrey of Monmouth says that the picture of the blessed Mary was on Arthur's shield Priwen, in order to put him in mind of her (p. 254), and this is the version generally found in the romances, and followed even by Wordsworth, who mentions

"Arthur, bearing through the stormy field  
The Virgin sculptured on his Christian shield."

*Eccl. Sonm.* I. x.

Tennyson seems to have been thinking of the famous "Russian emerald," said to have been sent originally by Pilate to Tiberius. It is supposed to have the head of Christ carved upon it, but Mr. King (*The Gnostics*, p. 146) shows good cause against our accepting it as

authentic. But the poet has taken the detail of the head on the cuirass from Spenser's Arthur :—

“Athwart his brest a bauldrick brave he ware  
That shined, like twinkling stars, with stones most  
pretious rare,  
And in the midst thereof, one pretious stone,  
Of wondrous worth, and eke of wondrous might,  
Shapt like a Ladie's head, exceeding shone,” etc.

*P. Q.*, l. vii. 29.

Spenser is too good a Protestant to say “Shapt like *our* Ladie's head”; he leaves this for the student of antiquities to discover!

In line 405 the fine description of the “green light from the meadows underneath,” striking up into the chalky roof of the cave and illuminating it, may be compared with Shelley's *Dream of the Unknown* :—

“Floating water-lilies, broad and bright,  
Which lit the oak that overhung the hedge  
With moonlight beams of their own watery light”;

and with Peele's *Polyhymnia* (ed. Dyce, p. 570) :—

“Plume as black as raven's wing  
That from his armour borrowed such a light  
As boughs of yew receive from shady stream.”

The often-repeated line, “But when the next day broke from under ground,” seems to be one of those faint Homeric echoes that become fainter in the later Idylls. There is doubtless a reminiscence of Plato in the Socratic

"No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
Of greatness to know well I am not great" (l. 447).

Tennyson has given us a similar picture to that of the diamond sparkling in the heart of the carven flower, line 546, in *Maud*, I. xiv. 2 :—

"Maud's own little oak-room  
(Which Maud, *like a precious stone*  
*Set in the heart of the carven gloom,*  
Lights with herself," etc.

The character of Gawain has been already commented on, but a change in line 554, "And Gareth, a good knight," should be noted : the first edition of the poem (1859), before Gareth and Lynette took form probably, reads, "And Lamorak, a good knight," etc.

Gawain's "Lancelot! that true man!" line 660, is of course ironical; but Elaine understands neither his mockery nor his "free flashes from a height above her," courtly badinage, line 642.

Gawain, by "deeming our courtesy is the truest law," line 706, angers the king, who holds that the vow of obedience is the one true law, the true truth for a knight to follow; and Arthur's dictum, "obedience is the courtesy due to kings," coincides with his "authority forgets a dying king," when Bedivere disobeys his behest in like manner. Elaine sees that Gawain should not have given her the diamond: "Lest I be found," she says, "as faithless in the quest, As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me" (l. 755).

Lines 870-871, "His honour rooted in dishonour

stood," etc., are quoted by Bain (*Rhet. and Comp.* i. 205) as an example of Tennyson's love of epigram.

Line 922—"that I live to hear is yours" (it is due to you that I am alive to-day to hear you)—recalls line 857: "Her fine skill had saved his life." In those rough old times a knowledge of curing wounds was an ordinary and very important part of a lady's education (see Roquefort, *Poésies de Marie de France*, ii. 198).

"The Phantom of the house that ever shrieks before a death" is described in Croker's stories of the Banshee (*Fairy Legends*, pp. 103, 119; compare Scott's *Rosabelle*, and see Baring Gould, *Curious Myths*, sec. series, pp. 215 and 225). The following remarkable account of such a phantom is quoted in Mr. Dyer's *English Folklore*, p. 208, from the MS. Memoirs of Lady Fanshaw:—"Her husband, Sir Richard, and she chanced, during their abode in Ireland, to visit a friend, who resided in his ancient baronial castle, surrounded with a moat. At midnight she was awakened by a ghastly and supernatural scream, and looking out of bed, beheld, by the moonlight, a female face and part of the form, hovering near the window. The face was that of a young and rather handsome woman, but pale; and the hair, which was reddish, was loose and dishevelled. This apparition continued to exhibit itself for some time, and then vanished with two shrieks, similar to that which had first excited Lady Fanshaw's attention. In the morning, with infinite terror, she communicated to her host what had happened, and found him prepared not only to

credit, but to account for what had happened. 'A near relation of my family,' said he, 'expired last night in this castle. Before such an event happens in this family and castle, the female spectre whom you have seen is always visible. She is believed to be the spirit of a woman of inferior rank, whom one of my ancestors degraded himself by marrying, and whom afterwards, to expiate the dishonour done to his family, he caused to be drowned in the castle moat.'" (That drowning a woman expiates the dishonour of marrying her both Lady Fanshaw and Mr. Dyer seem to take for granted, as they make no comment on the circumstance.)

The first and second chapters of Malory's eighteenth book deal with a quarrel between Lancelot and Guinevere, from which Tennyson seems to have taken some scattered touches. Thus in lines 733-738 we read that Guinevere sat with lips "severely placid," and "crushed the wild passion out against the floor beneath the banquet"; as in Malory—"wit ye well, inwardly, as the book saith, she took great thought; but she bare it out with a proud countenance, as though she felt nothing nor danger" (chap. ii.) Again, Lancelot makes "full many a holy vow and pure resolve" (line 873) in his mid-sickness; this, and his remorseful determination at the end of the *Idyll* to break the bonds that so defame him, may perhaps be traced to Malory's words, *XVIII. i.*: "And ever as much as he might he withdrew himself from the company and fellowship of Queen Guenever, for to eschew the slander and noise."



The two chapters should be studied as illustrating the lovers' quarrel that ends in the diamonds being flung into the river—those diamonds that would have been thrice their worth as Lancelot's gift, had he not lost his own worth in Guinevere's eyes through his disloyalty (line 1205).

The description of the tongueless man, whose side-face was only seen so long as he steered the boat, turning *full eye* to them, and pointing to the lifeless maiden and the doors, forms a very pathetic picture of mute sorrow.

Line 1259, "And Lancelot came and mused at her," is the only line that distinctly recalls the *Lady of Shalott* :—

"But Lancelot mused a little space ;  
He said, 'She has a lovely face ;  
God in his mercy lend her grace,  
The Lady of Shalott.'"

The death of Lancelot in the odour of sanctity is described in Malory's closing pages ; but the words that end this Idyll, "Not knowing he should die a holy man," are from Book XVI. chap. v. : "But God knoweth his thought, and his unstableness ; and yet shall he die right an holy man."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE HOLY GRAIL

THE achieving of the quest of the Holy Grail is the highest deed that the Arthurian knights can attempt, and it is part of Arthur's scheme of gradually-evolved progress that this spiritual task shall not be undertaken before his followers have risen through the indispensable preliminary grades of social order and moral perfection. When these degrees of development have been passed, and not until then, the quest of holiness will be ripe for achievement. It is the last and greatest stage of progress, the fourth zone, in which "men with growing wings" will crown the edifice that Arthur is raising upon earth. Hence we see that their unorganised attempt is doomed to failure; the time is not ripe for it, seeing that but few of the knights have even yet reached the lower preliminary plane of perfect manhood. And failure in this means failure in all, for the supreme task having been found impossible, despair must follow the discovery, and utter moral weakness

will be the result. The ideal hope that sustained them can give them strength no more.

This madness of an hour is destructive of the moral growth that has preceded it; for though Arthur tries to rebuild his system, he rightly interprets the premature apparition of the Grail as a sign to main the order he has made (line 297).

In the order of events in the Romance, *Pelleus and Ettarre* comes in the fourth, the *Grail* in the eleventh to seventeenth, and *Blaine* in the eighteenth books. Tennyson changes this arrangement, putting *Blaine* before and *Pelleus* after the *Grail* quest, whereby he makes the order of succession conform to the spiritual movement of the epic.

The Idyll of the Holy Grail marks the turn of the tide of Arthur's fortunes; the succeeding poems display the ebbing of his influence and authority still further, until that last scene, when all seems lost, and he departs for a time from a world unripe for regeneration.

From the position of supremacy that Tennyson assigns to the mystical quest of the Grail, as symbolising the attainment of spiritual perfection, it will be inferred that he cannot have reproduced the story very closely from the *Morte Darthur*, but must have merely taken descriptive and illustrative touches from various portions of the old Romance.

That this is the case will be seen from a study of Malory, Books XI. to XVII., and especially the follow-

ing portions: Bk. XI. ii. iv. xiv.; the whole of Bk. XIII.; Bk. XIV. i. ii. Tennyson has not made any particular use of the rest of Bk. XIV., which describes Percivale's struggle against the Seven Deadly Sins. Bk. XV. details Lancelot's adventures in the quest. Bk. XVII. should be read, especially chapters ii. vii. xii. xiii. xiv. and xv.

Tennyson's *St. Agnes* and *Sir Galahad* should also be compared, the former with the character of Percivale's sister, and the latter with the Galahad of the Idyll.

In the days of chivalry, the knightly career of warfare and action was a preliminary to the period of meditation, when the weary warrior laid his sword before the altar in some hermitage or cloister, and "passed into the silent life of prayer."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Malory (XVII. xxiii.) tells us that as soon as Galahad was dead and buried, "Sir Percivale yielded him to an hermitage out of the city, and took a religious clothing"; and Tennyson supposes that Percivale in this retirement tells an old monk, named Ambrosius, the story of the Grail.

The Idyll, therefore, takes the form of a dialogue, in which Ambrosius is the questioner and Percivale the narrator of the story.

This enables the poet to impart a greater air of verisimilitude to the recital of miraculous occurrences than he might have felt able to do if he had told the tale

<sup>1</sup> See *Faerie Queene*, VI. v. 34-38.

himself, as he does in all the other Idylls, with the exception of the *Passing of Arthur*.

The old monk begins by asking Percivale why he left the Round Table, and Percivale replies that since he saw the sweet vision of the Grail he has cared no longer for mere worldly glories of tournament and court.

What was this Grail? a phantom? asks Ambrosius. Nay, not a phantom but a reality, being indeed the very cup from which our Lord drank the wine at that Last Supper with his chosen ones. Joseph brought it from Aromat (Arimathea) to Glastonbury, where it wrought miracles for a time, but the world grew too wicked, and so it vanished away to Heaven.

The monk says that he has indeed read in the old chronicles of the coming of Joseph to Britain, but they are silent regarding the Grail itself.<sup>1</sup>

Percivale replies that he heard of it first from his sister, whose aged confessor told her about it.

This venerable man deemed that it might come again, when the foundation of Arthur's Table first revived his hopes of a regenerated world, but sin broke out and those early expectations died away. But the maid, an ethereally pure nun, prayed and fasted that she might be blessed with the holy vision. At last

<sup>1</sup> This is so in fact—the Grail story is not in the early ecclesiastical histories, being a legend of pagan origin. Through the Celtic story of Peredur it was brought into the romantic legends by Walter Map. By changing it from a dish to a cup, Tennyson seems to mean us to identify the Grail with the doctrine of the Eucharist in some way.

her prayers were answered, and it came. And afterwards she told Percivale of the miracle she had seen.

Up to this point the Idyll borrows only indistinct and scattered touches from the *Morte Darthur*. Malory (XIV. i. and XVII. ii.) describes two holy women, first Percivale's aunt, and then his sister; but the poet's exquisite picture of the saintly maiden owes very little to either of these personages. The account of the hoary confessor, "well-nigh a hundred winters old," probably Nacien the hermit, who had received the tradition of the Grail through a series of five or six predecessors each as old as himself, seems intended to replace Malory's legendary genealogy of Pellam (Pelles), which goes back to Joseph of Arimathea (XV. iv.), through whom Lancelot, and consequently Galahad on both sides, trace their lineage to "our Lord Jesu Christ"! (Malory, XIII. vii.)

The apparition of the holy vessel, as related in the *Morte Darthur* (see XI. ii.), will be described later on. The aurora-like vibrations of rosy light, line 118, "rose-red with beatings in it," are not mentioned by Malory. They are doubtless intended by Tennyson to indicate the presence of the living holy blood in the Eucharistic chalice (*vide* XVII. xviii.)

We may now continue the story of the Idyll. The saintly nun told Percivale to prepare himself and his fellow-knights by fasting and prayer for the miracle

that might be shown to them. Percivale accordingly warned the others; and when one of them, Galahad, heard of the nun's vision, his eyes became filled with a spiritual rapture like her own.

The origin of this young Galahad, continues Percivale, was involved in mystery; some said that he was Lancelot's son—but when was Lancelot ever lewd?—and others, mere catchers at flying rumours, and ready to believe anything, deemed him begotten by enchantment.

Here Tennyson sweeps aside at a touch Malory's rigmarole of the "enchantment" by which Lancelot and Pelles's daughter Elaine had become the parents of Galahad (see XI. ii. iii. vi.; IV. i.); and the story of the dubbing of Galahad (XIII. i.-iv.) But while omitting a long history of the sword and scabbard, the poet follows the Romance somewhat closely in his description of the baldric of hair that the holy maiden plaits for her spiritual lover.

Percivale describes it as follows:—

“ But she, the wan sweet maiden, shone away  
Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair  
Which made a silken mat-work for her feet;  
And out of this she plaited broad and long  
A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread  
And crimson in the belt a strange device,  
A crimson grail within a silver beam;  
And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on him,  
Saying, ‘ My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,  
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,

I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.  
Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,  
And break thro' all, till one will crown thee king  
Far in the spiritual city : ' and as she spake  
She sent the deathless passion in her eyes  
Thro' him, and made him hers, and laid her mind  
On him, and he believed in her belief."

Compare Malory's account :—

"Fair sir, said Percivale's sister, dismay you not, for by the leave of God I shall let make a girdle to the sword, such one as shall belong thereto. And then she opened a box, and took out girdles which were seemly wrought with golden threads, and upon that were set full precious stones, and a rich buckle of gold. Lo lords, said she, here is a girdle that ought to be set about the sword. And wit ye well the greatest part of this girdle was made of my hair, which I loved well while that I was a woman of the world. But as soon as I wist that this adventure was ordained me, I clipped off my hair and made this girdle in the name of God. Ye be well found, said Sir Bors, for certes you have put us out of great pain, wherein we should have entered ne had your tidings been. Then went the gentlewoman and set it on the girdle of the sword. Now, said the fellowship, what is the name of the sword, and what shall we call it? Truly, said she, the name of the sword is, the sword with the strange girdles, and the sheath, mover of blood ; for no man that hath blood in him shall never see the one part of the sheath which was made of the tree of life. Then they said to Galahad, In the name of Jesu Christ, and pray you that ye gird you with this sword, which hath been desired so much in the realm of Logris. Now let me begin, said Galahad, to gripe this sword for to give you courage : but wit ye well it belongeth no more to me then it doth to you. And then he griped about it with his fingers a great deal. And then she girt him about the middle with the sword :—How reck I not



though I die, for now I hold me one of the blessed maidens of the world, which hath made the worthiest knight of the world. Damsel, said Galahad, ye have done so much that I shall be your knight all the days of my life" (XVII. vii.)

Percivale then tells of the miraculous signs that were seen about that time, and of the Siege Perilous—a mystic chair that Merlin had made, wherein no man dared to sit lest he should lose himself. And Merlin had himself once in a moment of forgetfulness sat in the fatal seat, and so had perished (II. 165-176).

This is the only allusion to the fate of Merlin. Apparently the knights thought that he had disappeared through sitting in the Siege Perilous. They could not of course divine his real fate, though in the *Morte Darthur* this becomes known to them.

It is not easy to see what symbolical meaning Malory attaches to the Siege Perilous (see III. iv., XI. i.); but Tennyson plainly intends it to signify the temptations of "sense." Merlin himself once yielded to these, and so was lost.<sup>1</sup>

But when Galahad heard of this fatal chair, he cried: "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. x. 39; cf. John xii. 25).

In this and in what follows the poet again varies the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Elsdale suggests that the Siege Perilous represents "the chair of knowledge" (p. 62). As Tennyson takes it direct from Malory, its peril may consist in whatsoever we please to imagine; but since Galahad alone has power to sit in it, the one interpretation will do just as well as the other.

legend; for Malory (XIII. iv.) tells that Galahad is duly installed in the Siege Perilous, on which his name has been found to be inscribed.

Percivale next relates how one summer night Galahad insisted upon sitting in the Perilous Seat. At once the palace was shaken, thunders crashed, and a voice was heard; and then the Grail glided on a beam of light through the hall of banquet. But the holy vessel was covered so that none could see it. Percivale vowed that he would follow it for a year and a day to gain a sight of it; and Galahad vowed, and Bors, and Lancelot, and others, and Gawain the loudest of all.<sup>1</sup>

Did not the king also vow? asks Ambrosius. No, Percivale answers; Arthur was that day away exterminating a band of outlaws, and was on his homeward way when he beheld from the plain the thunder-smoke arising from the hall.

Then follows an elaborate description of the great hall of Camelot, with its sculptured emblems of the stages of social progress, from utter barbarism to the highest spiritual attainment, and the twelve side-windows storied with Arthur's battles, and the east window picturing the finding of Excalibur, and the other window, facing the sunset, blank—and what shall blazon it? Perchance that scene when Arthur's sun shall set in the great deep, and Excalibur be flung away!

Arthur rode quickly to the hall, and learned from

<sup>1</sup> In Malory, Gawain is the first to vow the quest.

Percivale what had befallen (ll. 179-272). And then Arthur's face darkened, as Percivale had

"Seen it more than once,  
When some brave deed seem'd to be done in vain,  
Darken; and 'Woe is me, my knights,' he cried,  
'Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow.'"

These lines represent a moment of the highest spiritual tragedy; but the pathetic intensity is somewhat weakened by the dialogue that follows.

Accordingly we may turn back from this point to continue our comparison with the *Morte Darthur*.

In Book XIII. chap. vi. Arthur assembles his knights, for "now, said the king, I am sure at this quest of the Sancgreal shall all ye of the Table Round depart, and never shall I see you again whole together" (compare line 320). Jousts are held to prove Galahad, who "began to break spears marvellously," as he and Percivale do in the Idyll, lines 328-337.

After Guinevere has perceived a likeness in Galahad to his father Lancelot, they go to the Minster, and then to supper,

"And every knight sat in his own place as they were toforehand. Then anon they heard cracking and crying of thunder, that them thought that the place should all to-drive. In the midst of this blast entered a sun-beam more clearer by seven times-than ever they saw day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then began every knight to behold other, and either saw other by their seeming fairer than ever they saw afore. Not for then there was no knight might speak one word a great while, and so they looked every man on other,

as they had been dumb. Then there entered into the hall the holy Graile covered with white samite, but there was none might see it, nor who bare it. And there was all the hall full filled with good odours, and every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in this world: and when the holy Graile had been borne through the hall, then the holy vessel departed suddenly, that they wist not where it became. Then had they all breath to speak. And then the king yielded thankings unto God of his good grace that he had sent them. Certes, said the king, we ought to thank our Lord Jesu greatly, for that he hath showed us this day at the reverence of this high feast of Pentecost. Now, said Sir Gawaine, we have been served this day of what meats and drinks we thought on, but one thing beguiled us, we might not see the holy Graile, it was so preciousely covered: wherefore I will make here avow, that to-morn, without longer abiding, I shall labour in the quest of the Sancgreal, that I shall hold me out a twelvemonth and a day, or more if need be, and never shall I return again unto the court till I have seen it more openly than it hath been seen here: and if I may not speed, I shall return again as he that may not be against the will of our Lord Jesu Christ. When they of the Table Round heard Sir Gawaine say so, they arose up the most party, and made such avows as Sir Gawaine had made.

"Anon as king Arthur heard this he was greatly displeased, for he wist well that they might not againsay their avows. Alas! said king Arthur unto Sir Gawaine, ye have nigh slain me with the avow and promise that ye have made. For through you ye have bereft me of the fairest fellowship and the truest of knighthood that ever were seen together in any realm of the world. For when they depart from hence, I am sure they all shall never meet more in this world, for they shall die many in the quest. And so it forethinketh me a little, for I have loved them as well as my life, wherefore it shall grieve me right sore the departition of this fellowship. For I have had an old custom to have them in my fellowship" (XIII. vii.)

There is nothing in Malory that anticipates the description of the great hall that Merlin made, although in an earlier part of the Romance (II. xi.) we are told of certain small images of twelve kings, made by Merlin on Lot's tomb, "and King Arthur was made in sign of a figure standing above them with a sword drawn in his hand." Merlin's sculptures and paintings on his four famous fountains, and on Tristram's tower, are also described at some length in the *Orlando Furioso* of Ariosto.

Percivale next describes the metaphors by which Arthur sought to show them that they were going upon a quest beyond their powers. Galahad being pure enough for such an aim, they all deemed themselves Galahads in purity; Taliessin being the greatest bard, they were all going to be Taliessins; Lancelot being the first in prowess, they would all take on themselves the toils of Lancelot! They were mere foolish sheep that followed the bell-wether anywhere!

In reality they were not Galahads or Percivales, great spiritual champions, but only valiant knights, who had fought the heathen. For such tasks they were fitted, but not yet for higher undertakings. Still, man's word is a sacred thing, and, having vowed the quest, Arthur bade them attempt it, though he foreknew that their endeavour would be vain. The pity of it was that, while they followed this *ignis fatuus*, many practicable opportunities of doing good would arise and be neglected, there being no knights left for such work.

Then Percivale recounts his own sufferings and ultimate victory. He found that all earthly things—pleasures of the sense, love, children, wealth, fame and splendour, the proudest aspirations—were mere illusions, apples of Sodom, dust and ashes; the Grail alone—spiritual purity—was worth the seeking, and humility was of all things the needfulest in the search (II. 375-456). These trials of Percivale replace the conflicts with the Seven Deadly Sins in the Romance; Malory gives only one small hint that is embodied in the description of the brook that looks so inviting but changes into dust (I. 387): “and when he stooped to drink the water, the water sank from him” (XVI. ii.) The Spenserian picture of the hermitage in the lowly vale takes the place of the third chapter of Malory’s Bk. VII.

We are next told how Galahad came to the hermitage. He and Percivale prayed together, and at the “sacring of the mass” (Malory XVII. xv.) Percivale saw only the holy elements of bread and wine; but Galahad, with eyes purged, beheld the Grail descend upon the shrine, and

“The fiery face as of a child  
That smote itself into the bread.”

This is verbatim from Malory, XVII. xx.:—

“And then he took an ubbly, which was made in likeness of bread; and at the lifting up there came a figure in likeness of a child, and the visage was as red and as bright as any fire, and smote himself into the bread, so that they all saw it, that the bread was formed of a fleshly man, and then he put it into the holy vessel again.”

In representing Galahad as on a spiritual height far above all the other characters, the poet has followed the legend; but in Galahad even more than in Arthur himself there is something too abstract, shadowy, cold, to touch our hearts. Galahad's victory has been won before he comes upon the scene; that he will achieve the blissful vision is not in doubt for a single instant. He is like those knights of romance who possess magic arms, who overthrow by enchantment and not by human prowess.

Superhuman incarnations of virtue like Galahad lack the "touch of earth," the "low sun" that makes the colour; he is not a mortal man as we are, and so his example fails to inspire us with hope, the only basis of emulation. We are told indeed that he lost himself to save himself, but how he did so is not vouchsafed to us to know: we are shown nothing of the struggle. There is more instruction in the weaklings of the world than in such lofty beings; more inspiration for us in creatures

"Not too bright and good  
For human nature's daily food"

than in such incredible personifications of abstract perfection. If Bunyan had only depicted the felicity of Christian after he has purged away all earthly dross and reached the holy city, his pages would have lacked all the touching human interest that makes us sympathise with the struggles and failures of his sorely-tried pilgrim. The contemplation of semi-angelic beings like Galahad

is more likely to discourage than to stimulate mere human strivings after the divine.

The poet gives us an allegorical picture of Galahad and Percivale amid a lurid scene of flashing lightnings and gloom, and storm, and swamp, and bones, and evil smell—a misty mingling of the Valley of the Shadow, the bridge of Mirza and the magic boat of Phædria<sup>1</sup>—in a bewildering phantasmagoria through which the figure of Galahad gleams and glances afar, and the Grail flames over him, and the spiritual city shines like a pearl of glory in the distance.

Then the poet drops from these heights to earth, and gives us the pleasant picture of the old monk's simple life beside the little thorpe, with its homely joys and local jokes and destiny obscure.

Percivale next makes confession of his own trials: one of the most beautiful and most touching incidents in the poem. He was tempted sorely but he overcame temptation, and achieved the quest.

In this account of Percivale, as in what follows of Bors and Gawain, lines 564-760, the poet has trusted to his own inventiveness, and has omitted the fine picture of the temptations of Bors that Malory has drawn in Book XVI.; but detached portions of the legendary tale crop up in the description that Lancelot gives of his madness and trials and partial achievement of the quest. Thus Lancelot's consciousness of the taint that

<sup>1</sup> Compare Malory XVI. xvii. of the visionary ship "that went so fast that him seemed the ship went flying."



incapacitates him from "adventures of holy things" is shown in Bk. XIII. chap. xix. The fine metaphor in line 772, of all the pure and noble in him twining

"Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower  
And poisonous grew together,"

may have been suggested by a passage in XVI. viii. describing "two flowers like a lily, and the one would have taken the other's whiteness"; but it also finds a parallel in Shelley, *Marenghi*—

"Good and ill like vines entangled are,  
So that their grapes may oft be plucked together."

Lancelot's "old madness" is told of in Book XI., from chapter viii. onwards to XII. v.

From line 792, "But such a blast, my king, began to blow," the resemblance to Malory, XVII. xiv., becomes closer. Compare the following in particular:—

"And the wind arose, and drove Launcelet more than a month throughout the sea, where he slept but little, but prayed to God that he might see some tidings of the Sangreal. So it befell on a night, at midnight he arrived afore a castle, on the back side, which was rich and fair. And there was a postern opened towards the sea, and was open without any keeping, save two lions kept the entry; and the moon shone clear. Anon Sir Launcelet heard a voice that said, Launcelet, go out of this ship, and enter into the castle, where thou shalt see a great part of thy desire. Then he ran to his arms, and so armed him, and so he went to the gate, and saw the lions. Then set he hand to his sword, and drew it. Then there came a dwarf suddenly, and smote him on the arm so sore that the sword fell out of his

hand. Then heard he a voice say, Oh man of evil faith and poor belief, wherefore trowest thou more on thy harness than in thy Maker? for He might more avail thee than thine armour, in whose service thou art set. Then said Launcelot, Fair Father Jesu Christ, I thank thee of thy great mercy, that thou reprovest me of my misdeed. Now see I well that ye hold me for your servant. Then took he again his sword, and put it up in his sheath, and made a cross in his forehead, and came to the lions, and they made semblant to do him harm. Notwithstanding he passed by them without hurt, and entered into the castle to the chief fortress, and there were they all at rest. Then Launcelot entered in so armed, for he found no gate nor door but it was open. And at the last he found a chamber whereof the door was shut, and he set his hand thereto to have opened it, but he might not."

The next chapter tells "How Sir Launcelot was tofore the chamber wherein the holy Sancgreal was," and begins thus :—

"Then he enforced him mickle to undo the door. Then he listened, and heard a voice which sang so sweetly that it seemed none earthly thing: and him thought the voice said, Joy and honour be to the Father of Heaven."

He is not allowed to enter the chamber, which makes him "right heavy." He sees "a great clearness," and

"Then looked he up in the midst of the chamber, and saw a table of silver, and the holy vessel covered with red samite, and many angels about it, whereof one held a candle of wax burning, and the other held a cross, and the ornaments of an altar. And before the holy vessel he saw a good man clothed as a priest, and it seemed that he was at the sacring of the mass. And it seemed to Launcelot that above the priest's hands there

were three men, whereof the two put the youngest by likeness between the priest's hands, and so he lift it up right high, and it seemed to shew so to the people."

This is another attempt to introduce a literal representation of religious mysteries in such a way as to be understood of the people! Lancelot ventures to enter the sacred chamber, and approaches the "table of silver";

"And when he came nigh he felt a breath that him thought it was intermeddled with fire, which smote him so sore in the visage that him thought it burnt his visage; and therewith he fell to the earth, and had no power to arise, as he that was so araged that had lost the power of his body, and his hearing, and his saying."

So he swoons, and is borne away by "many hands about him." When he recovers, fourteen days later, he asks where he is, and "Then said they all that he was in the Castle of Carbonek"; or, as Malory elsewhere calls it, the Castle of Corbryn (Sommer, iii. 214).

After telling how the quest was not for the reckless and irreverent Gawain, Percivale ends his tale with Arthur's words of mournful comment. Things had happened as he had foretold, and he was left gazing at a diminished chivalry, some bewildered and some disheartened and some lost.

Compare the opening lines of this Idyll with Wordsworth's *Ecel. Sonn.* I. xxi.—

"Lance, shield, and sword relinquished, at his side  
 A bead-roll, in his hand a clasped book,  
 Or staff more harmless than a shepherd's crook,  
 The war-worn Champion quits the world—to hide  
 His thin autumnal locks where Monks abide  
 In cloistered privacy."

The world-old yew-tree's smoke, line 15, is noticed by Tennyson in lines that he has inserted in the later editions of *In Memoriam*, xxxix.—

"Old warder of these buried bones,  
 And answering now my random stroke  
 With fruitful cloud and living smoke,  
 Dark yew," etc.

The *pale* of the cloister, line 21, is Milton's "cloister's pale" (*Il Pens.*); it was the usual term for the limits of a monastery.

The comparison in line 25—

"For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,  
 Some true, some light, but every one of you  
 Stamp'd with the image of the King"—

recalls the metaphor of Posthumus in *Cymbeline*, II. v., "Some coiner with his tools made me a counterfeit," and again, more closely, V. iv.—

"For Imogen's dear life, take mine; and though  
 'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life; you coin'd it;  
 'Tween man and man they weigh not every stamp;  
 Though light, take pieces for the figure's sake."

We have also metaphors from coins in Milton, *Sams. Agon.* 189; *Comus*, 739.

Aromat—a name suggestive of Sabæan spicery and sweet Eastern balms—is used for Arimathea, a town in Palestine, probably the modern Ramleh, and the home of the “honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God,” Joseph, who placed Christ in the sepulchre that had been made for himself. The mediæval legend added that Joseph had received in the Grail the blood that flowed from the Saviour’s side.<sup>1</sup>

The Temple of Jerusalem was on Mount Moriah, and the wandering of the dead after the crucifixion, line 50, is told in St. Matthew xxvii. 50-53.

The Glastonbury thorn, line 52, says Ogilvy, is “a variety of hawthorn which puts forth leaves and flowers about Christmastide. This variety is said to have originated at Glastonbury Abbey, and the original thorn was believed to have been the staff with which Joseph of Arimathea aided his steps on his wanderings from the Holy Land to Glastonbury, where he is said to have founded the celebrated Abbey.”<sup>2</sup>

The name of Prince Arviragus, line 61, is familiar to readers of *Cymbeline*. Stow, in his *Abridgement or Summary of the English Chronicle*, p. 17, ed. 1607, says that “Arviragus reigned 28. years [from 44 to 72 A.D.] . . . The yeare after Christes birth 63. came unto Brytane Joseph of Aramathie and 11. other Christians, who builded them a Chappell in the Isle of Avalon,

<sup>1</sup> See Introd. to Globe ed. of *Morte Darthur*.

<sup>2</sup> See too Villemarqué’s *Table Ronde*, p. 37.

& after was there buried, which place being since increased and newly builded, was named Glassenbury."

There is probably a side-allusion, in lines 108-111, to the mediæval legend that connected Arthur with the spectral huntsman, as already noted in chapter iii.

Line 147, "We know not whence they come," refers to the birds of passage, twittering swallows.

Of the Siege Perilous something has been said already. Malory's account of it in Book III. chap. iv. is: "But in the Siege Perilous," said Merlin, "there shall no man sit therein but one, and if there be any so hardy to do it he shall be destroyed, and he that shall sit in it shall have no fellow."

The contrast between Arthur's grimy band of warriors just back from burning the nest of robbers, and the rapt faces of the vision-struck knights who have vowed the vow, is strikingly told. By his question, "Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?" Arthur implies that Percivale does not realise the magnitude of the task that he has taken upon himself. None of them have seen it, and he asks what they went out into the wilderness to see (Matt. xi. 7); in other words, did they know the meaning of what they had seen? They had all heard a voice amid the crashing thunders, but Galahad alone had "ears to hear" it summon him to follow.

Taliessin, line 300, a name that means "the radiant brow," was the prince of British singers, and flourished

in the seventh century. His works have come down to us, and some of them, with the strange legend of his birth, will be found in the *Mabinogion*. Gray's bard invokes him: "Hear from the grave, great Taliessin, hear!"

The description of the strong White Horse, splashed and dyed in his own heathen blood, while primarily referring to the banner of Hengist, may have a further significance if we connect it with Shelley's personification—

"Last came Anarchy,—he rode  
On a white horse splash'd with blood."

The despair into which Percivale falls, lines 372-378, after the first burst of hope at setting out, is the same natural reaction that Bunyan represents by the Slough of Despond.

In line 383, "*Took* both ear and eye," we have a common Shaksperian use of *take*; from the sense of *overcoming*, it means *charm*.

"The gray-haired wisdom of the East," line 453, the magi or wise men who saw the star in the East at the birth of Jesus (Matt. ii.), are "the holy Elders with the gift of myrrh" mentioned in the *Passing of Arthur*, line 401.

The slaking of Percivale's thirst by the hermit has a symbolic as well as a literal meaning; he gives him to drink of the living water, whereof whosoever drinketh shall never thirst (John iv. 13; cf. Rev. xxi. 6). So

the spiritual city is the New Jerusalem that God hath prepared for his saints.<sup>1</sup>

The swamp, "part black, part whitened with the bones of men," line 500, through which Galahad passes, seems to be a poetical rendering of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, "which is as dark as pitch. . . . Now I saw in my dream," says Bunyan, "that at the end of this valley lay blood, bones, ashes, and mangled bodies of men, even of Pilgrims, who had gone that way formerly."

Percivale's austerities change him to "wan and meagre"—a description that reminds us of Spenser's

"All pale and wan as ashes was his look,  
His body lean and meagre as a rake."

*F. Q.*, II. xi. 22.

The beautiful picture of Percivale's early love for the princess of the castle to which he comes (the Lady Blancheflour she is called in the *Saint Graal* of Chretien of Troyes) tells the story of many a young knight's love, begun when he was

"A slender page about her father's hall,  
And she a slender maiden."

The supplication of the chief people, that Percivale will reign over them, may be compared with the story of Owain and the Lady of the Fountain in the *Mabinogion*. In Malory, Percivale is tempted by a fair fiend (XIV. ix.)

<sup>1</sup> Compare Spenser, *F. Q.*, I. x. 57.



When the gray old monk hears of these wonders, he says that small men like himself must be content with small aspirations in everyday life; his fellow-monks are unsympathetic, but if Percivale will care for him, even only a little, he will be content (ll. 612-616); and though, being vowed to monastic celibacy, he does not know what marriage is to a man, he can feel that Percivale's forsaking his princess when she was all but his bride was a terrible sacrifice to make—although in saying so he speaks too "earthly wise," too forgetfully of the supreme claims of spiritual devotion.

The legend of the Pelican feeding its young with drops of blood from its own breast (see Harting's *Ornith. of Shak.* p. 288) is told in the *Morte Darthur*, XVI. vi. xiii. Hence the bird was regarded as symbolic of Christ shedding his blood for mankind, and was sometimes adopted as a heraldic crest. Tennyson describes the helmet of Bors as having such a crest on it (l. 633).

Figures are often described as appearing "darkly against the moon's disk" in fairy legends (*e.g.* Croker, p. 11) and poems (*e.g.* *Alastor*). So the crest on Bors's helmet appears here.

The lion in the way (Proverbs xxvi. 13) that Lancelot alludes to in line 643 is his sinful love, an impediment to the whole-souled devotion that is needed from one who would seek the Grail.

Sir Bors meets some remnants of the old fire-worshippers, lurking in mountain wilds amid their cromlechs (stone circles) and dolmens (stone chambers, flat stones

on pillars). Their Druid priests, wise in astrology, scoff at this quest on which Bors is journeying. It is a false fire, a will-o'-the-wisp, they tell him ; there is no true fire to worship save the sun. Compare Vivien's song in *Balin and Balan*, line 450.

Bors seems to have been sustained in his prison-cell, line 672, as Joseph of Arimathea had been in days of yore, by the Holy Grail. However, the poet does not directly assert this, although he seems to leave it to be inferred.

The "seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round," line 681, have been noted in chapter iii.

In Malory, I. xi., a dream, "that there blew a great wind and blew down their castles and towns," is expounded to betoken "a great battle"; and in line 715 here the storm, shattering the heraldic emblems of the kings, symbolises the shock that the quest of the Grail has given to Arthur's order. The

"Wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,"

in line 350, called our attention to these emblems on the houses of the knights at Camelot, and prepared us for the scene of destruction that is described in lines 714-728.

Boutell and Aveling, in their *Heraldry*, explain the more difficult of these terms as follows :—

*Wyvern*, a monster of the dragon order, but having only two legs and feet ; it has wings, and a serpent-like tail, *nooned* [tied in a knot] and *barbed*.

*Unicorn*, a fabulous beast resembling the horse, but with one long horn projecting from the forehead.

*Basilisk*, like the wyvern, having a dragon's head at the end of the tail.

*Cockatrice*, an imaginary fabulous charge, half fowl and half reptile, similar to the wyvern, but combed, etc., like the cock.

*Talbot*, a sort of hunting-dog, between a hound and a beagle, with a large nose, long, round, and thick ears.

The story of Gawain's adventures is very differently told in Malory, and Tennyson contrives these "merry" adventures as in keeping with the lack of earnestness and reverence in Gawain's nature.

The gale blows him and his damsels about somewhat, otherwise he had a pleasant time; spiritual things disquiet worldly minds only for a little space.

The Grail is "clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud," line 513, when Galahad sees it; but it is "all pall'd in crimson samite" before the eyes of Lancelot (line 844); the sinless and the sinful visions differ, but that Lancelot sees it, even shrouded in red, may be a sign that he shall die a holy man; that though his sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool (Isaiah i. 18).

Gawain alludes to a curious fact in natural history when he says that he will be

"Deafer than the blue-eyed cat" (l. 862),

for albino cats have generally light blue eyes, and are often deaf. The more usual proverb is "deaf as a white cat."<sup>1</sup>

Line 871, "For these have seen according to their sight," is a biblical expression that Dryden, *Eleonora*, thus paraphrases :—

"In the blissful vision each shall share  
As much of glory as his soul can bear."

"His chair desires him here in vain," line 897, is also a paraphrase of "He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more" (Job vii. 10).

<sup>1</sup> Albino human beings are also often deaf, and it has been supposed that the want of pigment is associated with a defective development of the nervous system ; but there is nothing really known as to the reason of the correlation. Perhaps Tennyson had been reading Darwin's *Origin of Species*, ch. i. p. 9 : "Some instances of correlation are quite whimsical : thus cats which are entirely white and have blue eyes are generally deaf ; but it has lately been pointed out by Mr. Tait that this is confined to the males."

## CHAPTER XIII

### PELLEAS AND ETTARRE

PELLEAS is one of the new knights that Arthur has created to fill the gaps made in the Order of the Round Table by the disastrous quest of the Holy Grail. He is young and pure and enthusiastic, and in every way fitted to become, under favourable circumstances, one of those ideal knights upon whom Arthur still builds his hopes of a regenerated society.

But the spirit of the times is changed from that of the early days when the Arthurian chivalry "shined in its angel infancy"—the high resolve to follow truth in scorn of consequence no longer holds its place in the hearts of men and women as of old. Amid such surroundings, "most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly." The simple faith of Pelleas becomes simplicity; the child of light cannot cope with the children of the world.

When Ettarre pledges her faith,

“His helpless heart  
Leapt, and he cried, ‘Ay! wilt thou if I win?’  
‘Ay, that will I,’ she answer’d.”

He trusts a maiden’s troth, and is deceived.

When Gawain, as his friend, and by the honour of the Table Round, swears to be leal to him and work his work, he trusts a knight’s honour, and is befooled.

These two lies, the lie of love and the lie of friendship, destroy his hope and his faith. He is too unsophisticated to escape misfortune. He sees Ettarre and gives his heart to her, as the ideal lady of his own chivalric vow: in reality she is only little better than an unintellectual Vivien. He knows that men call Gawain Light-of-Love, and yet he trusts him to tame this mistress to his hand. His ensuing frenzy is as unreasonable as his unworldly credulousness has been. If men will mistake a naughty world for paradise they must bear the consequences.

The story of Pelleas and Ettard is told in Malory, Book IV., but, as usually, the descriptive portions of the Idyll—the pretty pictures of the first meeting with Ettarre, and of the garden at the false damsel’s castle—are created by the fancy of the poet; to whom is also due the suggestion of the general tainting of woman’s character that has spread from Guinevere’s example, and that displays itself in the cynical insincerity of Ettarre. In the Idyll, Ettarre’s moral culpability is clearly brought out; in the Romance, she is only

represented as accepting the circlet from Pelleas and afterwards refusing him her love.

Pelleas's madness, his meeting with Percivale, and his frantic outspokenness to Guinevere and Lancelot, are also additions by which the Idyll is made to conform more closely to the moral scheme of the epic. The *dénouement* is different in Malory, who says that when Pelleas had taken to his bed and was making great dole, the "damsel of the lake, Nimue," met with a knight who told her what had befallen. She caused herself to be brought to where Pelleas was lying plunged in grief, and thought that she had never seen "so likely a knight." She threw an enchantment over him and left him sleeping. Then she fetched Ettard, and threw an enchantment upon her, which made her love Pelleas madly. But when Pelleas awoke he hated her "more than any woman alive." So the lady Ettard pined away and died for sorrow, and the damsel of the lake and Sir Pelleas lived happily together ever after (IV. xxiii.)

This Nimue being the Vivien of the *Idylls*, and the interposition of enchantments having been employed as a contrivance in the Merlin story, the poet is precluded from following the Ettarre legend in its closing details. But the transformation of feeling that he describes as taking place in the hearts of both Ettarre and Pelleas is perfectly natural, and sufficient for the satisfaction of poetical justice.

In comparing the Idyll with the Romance, Malory's

account of Gawain's promise, and some extracts from the description of the incident of the sword, may be quoted.

When Pelleas tells Gawain the cause of his submitting to the despiteful usage of Ettarre's knights—

“Now, said Sir Gawaine; leave your mourning, and I shall promise you by the faith of my body, to do all that lieth in my power to get you the love of your lady, and thereto I will plight you my troth. Ah, said Sir Pelleas, of what court are ye? tell me, I pray you, my good friend. And then Sir Gawaine said, I am of the court of king Arthur, and his sister's son, and king Lot of Orkney was my father, and my name is Sir Gawaine. And then he said, My name is Sir Pelleas, born in the Isles, and of many isles I am lord.”

Pelleas beseeches Gawain to betray him not, but help him—

“Well, said Sir Gawaine, all this shall I amend, and ye will do as I shall devise. I will have your horse and your armour, and so will I ride to her castle, and tell her that I have slain you, and so shall I come within her to cause her to cherish me, and then shall I do my true part that ye shall not fail to have the love of her” (IV. xxi.)

Chapter xxii. begins thus:—

“And therewith Sir Gawaine plight his troth unto Sir Pelleas to be true and faithful unto him. So each one plight their troth to other, and so they changed horses and harness, and Sir Gawaine departed and came to the castle whereas stood the pavilions of this lady without the gate. And as soon as Ettard had espied Sir Gawaine she fled in toward the castle. Sir Gawaine spake



on high, and bad her abide, for he was not Sir Pelleas: I am another knight that hath slain Sir Pelleas. Do off your helm, said the lady Ettard, that I may see your visage."

The lady asks him faithfully whether he has slain Pelleas. Gawain says that he has, and tells his name and relationship to Arthur.

"Truly, said she, that is great pity, for he was a passing good knight of his body, but of all men on live I hated him most, for I could never be quit of him. And for ye have slain him I shall be your lady, and to do anything that may please you. So she made Sir Gawaine good cheer. Then Sir Gawaine said that he loved a lady, and by no mean she would love him. She is to blame, said Ettard, and she will not love you, for ye that be so well born a man, and such a man of prowess, there is no lady in the world too good for you. Will ye, said Sir Gawaine, promise me to do all that ye may, by the faith of your body, to get me the love of my lady? Yea, sir, said she, and that I promise you by the faith of my body. Now, said Sir Gawaine, it is yourself that I love so well, therefore I pray you hold your promise. I may not choose, said the lady Ettard, but if I should be forsworn. And so she granted him to fulfil all his desire.

"So it was then in the month of May that she and Sir Gawaine went out of the castle and supped in a pavilion, and in another pavilion she laid her damsels, and in the third pavilion she laid part of her knights, for then she had no dread of Sir Pelleas. And there Sir Gawaine abode with her in that pavilion two days and two nights. And on the third day in the morning early Sir Pelleas armed him, for he had never slept since Sir Gawaine departed from him. For Sir Gawaine had promised him, by the faith of his body, to come to him unto his pavilion by that priory within the space of a day and a night. Then Sir Pelleas mounted upon horseback, and came to the pavilions that stood

without the castle, and found in the first pavilion three knights in three beds, and three squires lying at their feet. Then went he to the second pavilion and found four gentlewomen lying in four beds. And then he went to the third pavilion and found Sir Gawaine with his lady Ettard, and when he saw that his heart well nigh burst for sorrow, and said : Alas ! that ever a knight should be found so false. And then he took his horse, and might not abide no longer for pure sorrow. And when he had ridden nigh half a mile, he turned again and thought to slay them both : and when he saw them both sleeping fast, unmethe he might hold him on horseback for sorrow, and said thus to himself, Though this knight be never so false I will never slay him sleeping ; for I will never destroy the high order of knighthood. And therewith he departed again. And or he had ridden half a mile he returned again, and thought then to slay them both, making the greatest sorrow that ever man made. And when he came to the pavilions he tied his horse to a tree, and pulled out his sword naked in his hand, and went to them there as they lay, and yet he thought it were shame to slay them sleeping, and laid the naked sword overthwart both their throats, and so took his horse and rode his way.

“Then Sir Gawaine and Ettard awoke out of their sleep, and found the naked sword overthwart their throats. Then she knew well it was Sir Pelleas’s sword. Alas ! said she to Sir Gawaine, ye have betrayed me and Sir Pelleas both, for ye told me ye had slain him, and now I know well it is not so, he is on live. And if Sir Pelleas had been as uncourtous to you as ye have been to him, ye had been a dead knight ; but ye have deceived me and betrayed me falsely, that all ladies and damsels may beware by you and me. And therewith Sir Gawaine made him ready and went into the forest.”

The striking expression in lines 76-78—

“For as the base man, judging of the good,  
 Puts his own baseness in him by default  
 Of will and nature”—

has been previously compared with *Vivien*, l. 824. In *The Foresters*, II. i., we also read of

“Weak natures, that impute  
 Themselves to their unlikes, and their own want  
 Of manhood to their leader.”

The simile of the widening rings caused by flinging a stone into water, line 89, Mr. Collins traces through many writers. It is too obvious and striking a phenomenon to have escaped the observant eyes of poets in all times.

Ettarre, line 184, cannot abide her simple-hearted lover, Sir Baby, as she calls him. She would rather be companioned by

“Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way”—  
 a saying less refined than Guinevere's (*Elaine*, 133)

“For who loves me must have a touch of earth,”  
 in the same degree that Ettarre is herself less refined than the great Queen; but both speeches mean the same thing. When David danced before the Lord, Michal despised him in her heart. Spiritual enthusiasm is not intelligible to women such as these are.

The true loftiness of Pelleas's nature is shown in

“I had liefer ye were worthy of my love,  
 Than to be loved again of you” (l. 293);

even his love for her, passionate though it is, is

not so strong as his love for truth and worthiness of character. The sentiment is something like Shelley's

"I hate thy want of truth and love ;  
How should I then hate thee ?"

In one small way Gawain is higher than Ettarre : he seems to have honestly meant what he said when he promised to be a true friend to Pelleas, but she lied deliberately from the first. Such degrees of difference, however, are only "of a certain order in the abyss"—not worth measuring by the scale of truth.

Pelleas's lay of the "worm within the rose," line 390, may be compared with Spenser's "lovely lay" of the rose of love, in the *Faerie Queene*, II. xii. 74, 75.

*Lurdane*, line 421, lazy and worthless, is an old word that Scott uses in the *Bride of Lammermoor*, chap. xxiv.; Spenser has "a lazy loord," *F. Q.*, III. vii. 12.

The terrible contrast that Swift has drawn in his picture of the Yahoos, brutalised men, and the Houyhnhnms, humanised brutes, is finely expressed in Pelleas's exclamation, line 470 :—

"O noble vows !  
O great and sane and simple race of brutes,  
That own no lust because they have no law !"

Compare what the poet says in *In Memoriam*, xxvii., of

"The beast that takes  
His license in the field of time,  
Unfetter'd by the sense of crime,  
To whom a conscience never wakes."

In line 482, "he that tells the tale" is Tennyson, who here departs from Malory's version of the story.

Pelleas's Berserker-like onslaught upon the character of Guinevere is as impetuous and as wanting in cautious sanity as his whole career has been.

Pelleas's words in line 556, "I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame," are like those that Parzival uses to Guinevere in the *Griseldis* of Halm: "Eh Gift und Dolch und Pest und eklen Aussatz, als deines namens klang!" (Act I.)

The metaphor of the slanderous tongue, that sharp weapon between the lips, is no doubt nearly as old as the human race itself: "the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Psalm lvii. 4); compare *Cymbeline*, III. iv.—

"Tis slander,  
Whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue  
Outvenoms all the worms of Nile";

and Spenser, *R. Q.*, V. xii. 36-42; VI. vi. 1.

The fine image in the closing lines—

"And all talk died, as in a grove all song  
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey"—

seems a development of a couplet in the laureate's early *Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere*—

"Sometimes the sparrowhawk wheel'd along  
Hush'd all the groves for fear of wrong,"

which in turn may have been derived from the old

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metrical romance of *Lancelot of the Lake* (Early Eng. Text Soc., ed. Skeat, lines 2481-2)—

“The birds may them hiding in the greves  
Wel fro the hawk that oft their lyf berevis.”

It is interesting to trace the evolution of the idea from the originally simple statement of the metrical Romance to the more complex simile in the Idyll.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE LAST TOURNAMENT

As in most of the other Idylls, the poet here begins his narrative by the statement of a circumstance taken from the middle of the story.

Tristram, harp in hand, met Dagonet, Arthur's jester, dancing like a withered leaf before the palace, —and thereby hangs a tale, which the poet accordingly proceeds to relate.

This Idyll is only indebted to Malory for the superficial outline of the story of Tristram and his two Isolts, and the vengeance of King Mark. The main object of the poem is to continue the exposition of the decline that is taking place in the spirit of chivalry amongst both the knights and the dames of Arthur's court.

Hence no detailed comparison with the *Morte Darthur* is necessary, although some detached passages may be quoted from Books VIII. and X., which deal with the Tristram story.

The condition of affairs represented is in keeping with what the preceding Idylls must have led us to

anticipate. Arthur is as energetic as before in opposing his younger knights to the *ever-climbing wave* of barbarism, but the metaphor itself indicates the hopelessness of his task, and even he begins to have a vague suspicion or presentiment that things are not going well with the knights. He seems to miss some of their old promptitude in obedience, their old loyal looks and reverential manner; their manliness, too, seems to be growing less and lower day by day.

As for the court itself, the murmuring dames at the Tournament speak a deeper truth than they know when they declare that all courtesy is dead, and the glory of the Round Table is no more.

In the early days—the time of Gareth and Geraint—the “Tournament of the Dead Innocence” could have meant but one thing—the memory of the dead innocent babe; but now there is another suggestion in the title, for the purity of the ladies and the knights has faded: it is their innocence that is dead.

This Tournament is the last, and it is a failure. As the gale makes havoc with the emblem of the kings after the quest of the Grail is ended, so here the “useful trouble of the rain” mars the pageant, and makes it “draggled at the skirt.” And the rules of tournament are not enforced. Lancelot presides as arbiter, but he too is dreaming of dead innocence, and takes so languid an interest that the laws of chivalry are broken before him with impunity.

Tristram wins the prize, and affronts the ladies



present by declaring that his queen of beauty is not among them.

Full well they know that Isolt of Cornwall is to receive the careanet : his paramour will wear the prize of purity. Then at night there is a revel at the palace, but "with mirth so loud beyond all use" that the Queen, in anger at such relaxation of decorum, and at what she knows to be its cause, ends the festivity; and "in her bosom pain was lord."

So we come to the incident from which our Idyll takes its start. The morning after this lugubrious tourney and riotous feast, little Dagonet danced like a withered leaf before the hall of Camelot. The wise Sir Tristram's folly is anatomised by the wandering glances of the fool.

Arthur wished his knights to "move to music with their Order and the King," but the music has become *broken music*—jangled out of tune and harsh : Tristram has played false with his bride in Brittany, and so he has played Arthur's music falsely too. Tristram twangles his harp for Dagonet to dance, but the dwarf stands stock still. He is no jester now, but speaks some certain truths, scarce fit for Tristram to hear. Tristram and the rest have been false to Arthur, says Dagonet; they have played ducks and drakes with their holy yows; things have grown so bad that even he, the King's fool, is indignant.

When he has uttered his protest, the worthy little fellow prances away, and Tristram sets off for the home

of Mark and Isolt, in Lyonesse. He thinks of Mark's fair Queen as he rides along, yet his love is not so all-absorbing but that his hunter's instinct is aroused whenever the footprints of a deer show on the path. Coming to an arbour that he had once built for himself and the Queen of Cornwall, he falls asleep there and dreams of the rival Isolts, of his leman, and of his wife.

The poet turns to tell of Arthur, how he succeeds in clearing out the last nest of bandits and in making the ways all safe from shore to shore. And yet, as in Guinevere's ill-boding heart, so in Arthur's, pain has sway. The victory should complete the first zone of Arthur's stages of progress, but the higher stages have become too high and too hard: the glory of the early time has faded away.

The love-scene between Tristram and Isolt is worthy of the beautiful old legend. But at last the "trenchant glaive" of Mark sweeps down, and Tristram's loves are over.

That same wet and dreary night Arthur returns, sad though victorious, to his home in Camelot, and little Dagonet clings sobbing to his feet; the faithful fool alone dares tell him why Guinevere's bower is dark—for the catastrophe has befallen: the Queen has fled.

An artist of less dramatic power than Tennyson would have made Dagonet tell us all about it. The laureate only indicates the occurrence by implication. First we are told of the sufferings of her bosom, in which pain was lord; Arthur has a pained heart,

gloomy forethoughts perchance, also ; then the external nature—a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom—is in sympathy with the mood of despondency, and with the scene of death and anguish that has been described as passing at that time in distant Lyonesse ; and last, the Queen's bower is dark—there is no one to welcome Arthur as he comes victorious. The very obscurity of the poor fool's agonised words intensifies the tragic horror of the moment. There is no more to be said : the curtain falls. <sup>f</sup>

Stories of children carried off by eagles are common in folk-tales—for instance little Surya Bai in Miss Frere's *Old Deccan Days*,—but Tennyson has seemingly based his story of the ruby necklace on an incident in the life of Alfred, quoted in Stanley's *Book of Birds*, the work which perhaps also suggested Lynette's "peacock in his pride." Bishop Stanley (p. 98, ed. 1890) gives the story from *Monast. Anglie*, vol. i., as follows :—

"Alfred, king of the West Saxons, went out one day a-hunting, and passing by a certain wood heard, as he supposed, the cry of an infant from the top of a tree, and forthwith diligently inquiring of the huntsmen what that doleful sound could be, commanded one of them to climb the tree, when on the top of it was found an eagle's nest, and lo ! therein, a sweet-faced infant, wrapped up in a purple mantle, and upon each arm a bracelet of gold, a clear sign that he was born of noble parents. Whereupon the king took charge of him, and

caused him to be baptized; and, because he was found in a nest, he gave him the name of *Nestingum*, and, in after time, having nobly educated him, he advanced him to the dignity of an earl."

Now have we not here just as close an antecedent of the nestling story as we have of the Enid story in the *Mabinogion*? The king riding along, the child's cry, the eagle's nest, the pretty babe, the precious ornaments, the taking charge of the child, even the name Nestingum, Nestling, that they give it? The sex of the babe is changed, and instead of becoming a countess the infant dies. The golden bracelets too are transformed into a ruby carcanet, and the tree is pictured with elaborate detail.

In Malory, Tristram is frequently represented as jesting with the other jocular knight of romance, Sir Dinadan. For some of his and Dagonet's pranks see Book X. chap. xii.

"The skeleton of a brother-slayer," line 47, refers to the story of the diamonds in *L. and Elaine*, line 41. The mutilation of the churl is an incident of a type that was common enough in the "good old times";—and yet even churls, says Arthur, are created in the image of God, and they must not be wronged by any man. Spenser, like Tennyson, has been struck by the remarkable words in Genesis i. 27, and he calls men "the images of God in earthly clay," and "the wondrous workmanship of God's own mould" (*F. Q.*, I. x. 39, 42). The churl's arm is "pitch-blackened"—the stump has

been dipped in pitch to stop the bleeding long enough to let the wretch bear the message of defiance to Arthur.

The King's dignity of spirit is shown in his address to the knights. He ignores the bandit chieftain's insolence, and calmly issues orders for the punitive expedition against these off-scourings of the realm, who are making their last stand in the North, as Satan and his rebellious angels did (*vide Par. Lost*, v. 659).

The "ever-climbing wave," line 92, recalls the *Lotus Eaters'* song: "Ever climbing up the climbing wave." There is a certain historical foundation for this account of the heathen invasions, for during the seventh century the country was harried incessantly by Picts from Caledonia, Scots from Ulster, and Jutes, Angles, and other Northern Saxons from the shores of the North Sea.

But when the King and his warrior "whom he loved and honoured most," Lancelot, stand alone together, Arthur speaks of what the churl has said.

"Is it then so well?

Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he

Of whom was written, 'A sound is in his ears'?"

This is explained by turning to the fifteenth chapter of Job: "A dreadful sound is in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him."

Lines 157-159—

"As one

Who sits and gazes on a faded fire,

When all the goodlier guests are past away"—

contain an image of loneliness after companions have departed that has been noticed by many poetic minds—as by Lamb, in the *Old Familiar Faces*; Moore, in “Like one who treads alone a banquet hall deserted”; and Coleridge, in *Youth and Age*.

In contrast to this scene of languor comes the glittering figure of Tristram, the “charges” on whose shield—the spear, harp, and bugle—typify his threefold character of warrior, harper, and hunter.

In line 249 Tristram says that dancing without music, like eating dry, is thirsty work. Dagonet’s standing still while Tristram twangs his harp is doubtless meant to recall St. Matthew xi. 17: “We have piped unto you and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented.”

Shakspeare plays upon the term “broken music” in “this broken music in his sides”—*As You Like It*, I. ii. 150; “your answer in broken music”—*Henry V.* V. ii. 263; “here is good broken music”—*Troilus*, III. i. 52. Properly speaking, *broken music* meant either (as Chappell explains) short unsustained notes, such as are made on stringed instruments when played without a bow; or concerted music, played by several instruments in combination.

The story of Tristram’s love for Mark’s Isolt has been referred to in chapter iii., and may be briefly narrated here.

Tristram having been wounded by an Irish spear can only be healed by an Irish hand, so he goes to

Ireland, and is treated by La Beale Isoud or Isolt, daughter of the Irish king. On his return he gives a glowing description of her to his uncle Mark, who sends him back as his envoy to ask for her hand. On the voyage from Ireland they innocently drink the potent philtre, and their fatal love for each other begins. Long after, when the effects of the philtre have become exhausted, Tristram is hurt by a poisoned arrow, and goes to Brittany to be cured by King Hoel's daughter, Isolt of the White Hands (Isoud la blanche Maynys), whom he loves and marries. Lancelot reproaches him for his inconstancy to La Beale Isoud, and the lady herself writes sadly to him. Tristram's old love revives, and he resolves to go to Cornwall to see his old love. There is a quarrel, and Tristram reproaches Isolt for her unfaithfulness to him! He goes mad, and throws Dagonet into a well. After many adventures Arthur knights him, and he runs away with Isolt, but is wounded in a tournament. Mark undertakes to nurse him, which he does by putting him into a dungeon. Tristram and Isolt again escape, and live in Lancelot's castle of Joyous Gard; he goes out riding with Isolt, both of them being clad in green attire, when probably the bower mentioned by Tennyson is constructed. He fights with many knights; but we need not go into the rest of his story, of which enough has been given to show its affinity to the Lancelot story, and to illustrate the love-scene with Isolt in the Idyll. We may, however, quote Malory's last words about them: "That

traitor king Mark slew the noble knight Sir Tristram, as he sat harping afore his lady La Beale Isoud, with a trenchant glaive, for whose death was much bewailing of every knight that ever was in Arthur's days . . . and La Beale Isoud died, swooning upon the cross of Sir Tristram, whereof was great pity" (XIX. xi.)

In the longest prose romance of "Tristan," the writer (Hélic de Boron is his pseudonym) expressly states that Tristram was the only knight who, for the love of fair Isolt, did not take the oath by which the other knights vowed to start in the quest of the Grail. For this he was reprimanded by Arthur but defended by Lancelot (Sommer, iii. 283).

In some of the romances (the versions Mr. Arnold follows) it is said that Tristram, being wounded by a poisoned lance in Brittany, sends to Cornwall for Isolt, and the old Greek device of the white and black sails is adopted to let him know of her approach. The ship is seen, with the white sail that signals Isolt's coming; but the jealous wife Isolt, who is watching to give the tidings to her dying husband, tells him that the vessel has a black sail. He dies at the news; Isolt of Cornwall arrives to find that she has come too late, and dies also (Sommer, iii. 288). In the MSS. Mark stabs him with a poisoned lance, and Tristram and Isolt die in each other's arms (*ib.*)

This summary will enable us to understand such allusions as "thou makest broken music with thy bride," and the final interview with Mark's Isolt, which, as will



also be seen, differs widely from the accounts in the romances.

Tristram, line 289, says that he came too late, after the fire of Arthur's renaissance had burnt itself out; or, to take the woodman of the woods' own metaphor,

"The life had flown, we sware but by the shell"—

the worthless "broken egg-shell" of Limours once more.

Yet, adds Tristram,

"I am but a fool to reason with a fool"—

the complement of the Biblical "answer a fool according to his folly" (Prov. xxvi. 5).

Tristram's song, lines 275-285, is a sort of triolet, but it should be observed that Tennyson does not conform to the classical French metres in the little troubadour-like songs that he inserts in the *Idylls*. Still, there is a distinct intentional suggestion of the old rondels and villanelles and triolets in these pretty little snatches of music.<sup>1</sup>

Tristram's song, "Free love, free field, we love but while we may," is on the old theme of the impossibility of binding love—"new loves are sweet as those

<sup>1</sup> The metro of the classical triolet may be seen in the following recipe for making one, by Mr. W. E. Henley:—

"Easy is the triolet,  
If you really learn to make it!  
Once a neat refrain you get  
Easy is the triolet.  
As you see! I pay my debt  
With another rhyme. Deuce take it,  
Easy is the triolet,  
If you really learn to make it!"

that went before"—the application of which doctrine by Tristram himself provokes in the Romance the remonstrance of Lancelot.

By their mockery of Dagonet, related by Tristram, line 300, the knights seem to imply that only a fool would keep Arthur's vows. Even the knights do not take these vows seriously any longer! A pretty pass for things to have come to at the Table Round. But since Dagonet has been made Arthur's fool, says Tristram, he has become so puffed up with conceit that he is neither one thing nor the other; neither the swine he was nor the fool he should be, but a "naked aught," a bare cipher. Yet Tristram still considers Dagonet a mere swine, for he has cast his pearls—these rhymes of "free love"—before him, and he has not appreciated them (Matt. vii. 6).

There is a true Shaksperian ring in the fool's moralising—

"I have had my day.

The dirty nurse, Experience, in her kind

Hath foul'd me—an I wallow'd, then I wash'd."

Spenser's Grylle would still "have his hoggish mind" (cf. Rev. xxii. 11), but however foul Dagonet may have been once, he has been purified by the spirit of Arthur, even though he is only the King's fool.

The "king's highway" is a common phrase, and the "black king's highway," line 343, is that broad way that leadeth to destruction (Matt. vii. 13), the great lake of fire, line 345 (Rev. xix. 20, etc.)

The "silent music up in heaven," line 349, is that "far off mysterious sound" the poets have sung and ancient philosophers have told off—Shakspeare's "music of the spheres," and Milton's "sphery chime."

Dagonet seems to combine St. Matthew's text, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" with Shelley's "Honey from silk-worms who can gather, or silk from the yellow bee?" into the jingling lines—

"*Figs* out of thistles, *silk* from bristles, milk  
From burning *spurge*, *honey* from hornet-combs,"

in which the emphasis seems rather smothered by the assonances.

*Spurge* is the euphorbia or milk-bush, which emits a powerfully acrid smoke when burning.

*Slot* and *fermet* (footprint and droppings) are old terms of "venerie" or woodcraft, introduced to harmonise with Tristram's character as "the founder of all good terms of venery and hunting" (Mal. X. lii.)

The word *matchcold*, Tennyson's machicolated, line 423, is used by Malory (VII. x.), and Sir E. Strachey explains it to mean "having holes within the parapet of the walls for pouring stones or molten lead through."

*Auff*, in line 438, is a preposition, governing *face*, and meaning "over."

The ancient legend of the scorpion-worm that twists in hell and stings itself to everlasting death, line 450, "jener scorpion der Saga, ringsum die Flammen,

drinnen Tod,"<sup>1</sup> grew out of the widespread belief that if a scorpion is surrounded by fire it will sting itself to death. *Worm* here denotes reptile. In the old Norse poems it is the word generally used for serpent.

*Darkling*, line 456, is here used in its more general adverbial sense, darkly.

The words, "Arthur knew the voice," line 454, seem to imply that this was some renegade knight who had broken his vows and reverted to the barbarous old ways of plunder and riotous excess.

In line 447 we are told that the brother of this Red Knight's paramour had been slain by one of Arthur's knights, but this does not enable me to identify this particular Red Knight. Some of the details have a slight resemblance to Malory, VII. xv., where nearly forty knights are hanging outside the castle of the Red Knight of the Red Lawns, but he bears merely a shield *gules*, and not one with a field *noir, gutté du sang* (line 432). Happily the matter is of no importance!

There is a fine effect produced by the sounding Arabic star-names, Alioth and Alcor, in the description of the burning stronghold, flaming up like the quivering aurora borealis. (Compare *Passing of Arthur*, line 307). Both these stars are in the tail of the constellation of the Great Bear.

In "the water Moab saw come round by the East," line 481, the poet alludes to 2 Kings iii. 22: "And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone

<sup>1</sup> Brandes, *Die Hauptströmungen der Lit. d. XIX. Jahrh.*, p. 187.

upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood: And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil."

When the lonely woman weeping near a cross tells Tristram that her man has left her or is dead, he thinks of the wife who weeps for him in Brittany; he would not that she should hate him, neither that she should love him; he knows not what he would on that subject—but he speaks to the forlorn woman by the roadside with a cynicism that is part of his doctrine of free love. Do not weep, he says, lest ye spoil your beauty, and when your mate returns he love you not.

By the lone woman weeping by the cross, does the poet mean to call to our minds the words of Malory, "And La Beule Isoud died, swooning upon the cross of Sir Tristram, whereof was great pity"? It may be one of those symbolic anticipations of which the *Idylls* present several examples.

"Last in a roky hollow, bellings heard  
The hounds of Mark,"

*Rokey*, rocky, vaporous; *bellings*—like the hounds of Theseus,

"Match'd in mouth like bells,  
Each under each. A cry more tuneable  
Was never holla'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,  
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly:  
Judge when you hear."—*M. A. D.* IV. i.

Mr. Elsdale (p. 83) interprets the line that follows, when Tristram

"Felt the goodly hounds  
Yelp at his heart,"

as being the ominous shadow of disaster cast before ; but quite as probably the words may mean that the belling of the hounds set the hunter's heart throbbing in harmony—he longed to follow the chase, but turned aside to Tintagil. Wordsworth's heart, he tells us, leaped up when he beheld a rainbow in the sky ; Tristram's beats high when he hears the baying of the good pack of dogs.

Mark steals "catlike," Isolt says ; King Fox, Lancelot called him.

There is some likeness to Byron's "Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow," in "What rights are his that dare not strike for them." Somewhat similarly, Spenser says : "In vaine he seekes, that having cannot hold" (I. vi. 33). Mark has before been described as a man of "poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings, . . . who strikes, nor lets the hand be seen" (*Garth*, 424), and Isolt warns Tristram to "eat not with Mark" (see Malory, VIII. ii.), and to beware of "an arrow from the bush." This is only Mark's way.

The quarrel between Mark and Tristram, alluded to in line 543, was about a lady, an earl's wife, whom Tristram and Mark both "loved passing well," and she loved Tristram "passing well." Her husband, Sir Segwarides, objected, and was brought "home on his

shield" as the result of his having remonstrated with Tristram. See Malory, VIII. xiii. xiv. If being carried home on his shield was all that an injured husband could reasonably expect when a Tristram or a Gawain had to be called to order, it does not seem altogether strange that "Mark's way" should have been sometimes resorted to as affording a preferable "satisfaction."

In line 564 Isolt says that Tristram used to call her his "white hind"—milk-white doe; such hunters' metaphors for a fair girl are common in the old ballads and plays. Falstaff calls the Merry Wife of Windsor his "doe with the black sent"; and in the *Bride of Lammermoor* Norman sings :

"But a lily-white doe in the garden goes,  
She's fairly worth them a'."

To sin in leading strings, line 570, means, to follow the example of Lancelot and Guinevere.

With line 627, "the swineherd's malkin in the mast," the wench among the beech-mast feeding swine, compare *Princess*, v. : "a draggled mawkin, thou, That tends her bristled grunters in the sludge."

Tristram's criticism of Arthur's impossible vows should be compared with the other passages dealing with this matter, for instance Guinevere's words in *Elaine*, line 130, and Merlin's in *Gareth*, line 267.

"The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour woos his own end," line 692. The colour of this bird varies, being brownish-gray in summer and white in winter.

The changes of plumage enable it to harmonise with its surroundings at the various seasons. If the ptarmigan's feathers were to turn white before the winter snows began, it would be seen by the eagle-owls and falcons, and would soon be killed. The metaphor is very ingenious. We are men, of the earth, earthy, like the ptarmigan's summer colour; if we try prematurely to become whiter than our surroundings, the rest of mankind, our ruin must follow. We cannot change into "men with budding wings" until the rest of the world is ready to become angelic also. This is Merlin's and Vivien's and Guinevere's old objection to Arthur's transcendentalism, as stated in sporting language by Tristram, and the argument, if admitted, is fatal to all upward strivings.

The woodman of the woods uses terms and similes from woodcraft. In his woods he hears the woodpecker tap the trees and expose their hollowness and inward decay, as he, Tristram, probes these vows and finds them hollow too. *Yaffil* and *Yaffingale* are provincial names that refer to the cry of the green woodpecker. The adult male bird has the top of the head bright scarlet, as far as the nape; the female has less red on the head (Yarrell, vol. ii.) The epithet "garnet-headed," like "yellow-throated" before of the nestling, shows that Tennyson's bird-lore, like Tristram's, comes from the book of nature.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edward Fitzgerald's interesting *Letters*, vol. i. p. 337, refer to the word *Yaffingale*. As there is no index to "Old Fitz's" book, it



In line 718 there is an imitation of a frequent Homeric turn of expression.

Like Merlin's rainbow in the sky, and rainbow on the sea, Tristram's sweet little song, "Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bend the brier," represents the contrast between earthly and spiritual ideals, Arthur's real star on high and Tristram's phantom star on the level of earth. One star, Arthur's lofty ideal, was far distant, making its silent music up in heaven, too far for Tristram to reach to; the other, earthly delight, was near and seemed attainable: but one was real and will endure, the other will pass away when the winds—the sorrows and passions of earth—ruffle the mere, the human heart.<sup>1</sup>

This song is Tristram's death-note; the joyous minnesinger makes "a swan-like end, fading in music."

may be of use to some of my readers if I note that Tennyson is mentioned on the following pages of vol. i. :—8, 15, 17, 21, 28, 30, 42, 95, 125, 144, 149, 154, 165, 188, 193, 195, 197, 200, 201, 208, 215, 273, 279, 283, 316, 317, 325, 336, 337, 380, 388, 389, 391, 419, 454, 467, 494, 497. Many of these references are, however, slight, and unimportant.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Elsdale interprets somewhat similarly, *Studies in the Idylls*, p. 92.

## CHAPTER XV

### GUINEVERE

THERE is a grim loneliness in the one name at the head of this Idyll. The original four Idylls of 1859 had all single titles—Enid, Vivien, Elaine, Guinevere; but in the revised and practically completed poem of 1870 the first three of these headings were enlarged, and only the fourth was left as it stood originally.

It is scarcely necessary to repeat that the *Morte Darthur* affords little more than a dim suggestion of the story here. The Idyll of Guinevere is a presentation of character, and a working out of the fatal consequences that ever follow on sin and falsehood. It teaches that

“Our acts still travel with us from afar,  
And what we have been makes us what we are.”

The crime of the beautiful Queen has now descended upon her own head.

In Malory, Book XX., Gawain's brothers Agravaine and Mordred lay a plot to entrap Lancelot; Gawain tries to dissuade them, but in vain; and he foretells that

if they persist in their design, "the noble fellowship of the Round Table shall be dispersed" (chap. i.) They nevertheless inform Arthur of Lancelot's treachery, and the King allows them to lay a snare for him (chap. ii.) The conspirators come upon the lovers unsuspecting of treachery, but Lancelot kills the first man who enters the apartment, fastens the door, and puts the dead man's armour on himself; then, sallying forth, slays Agravaine and twelve more. He implores Guinevere to escape with him, but she says that by doing so she will only cause more trouble, and that if she is in danger he may come and rescue her. They part, and Lancelot assembles his friends, who are set in "an embushment in a wood as nigh Carlisle as they might" (chap. vi.) Mordred tells Arthur of Lancelot's escape; Arthur marvels at Lancelot's prowess, and regrets that so great a knight should ever be against him. "Now I am sure that the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken for ever, for with him will many a noble knight hold; and now it is fallen so, said the king, that I may not with my worship but the queen must suffer the death" (chap. vii.) She is doomed to be burnt alive (*Guinevere*, line 534: "the doom of treason and the flaming death"). Lancelot saves her when she is at the stake, but in the melee he unwittingly slays Gareth and Gaheris, both of whom were unarmed. He carries off Guinevere to his castle of La Joyeuse Gard (Benwick), and is besieged there by Arthur and Gawain. They force him to fight, but "ever he did what he might to save the people on

king Arthur's party" (compare *Guin.* l. 432). Finally the Pope sends "bulls under lead" to stop the quarrel.

Guinevere is given up by Lancelot and received back by Arthur, who, urged on by Gawain, wages a second war, and besieges Lancelot in his castle of Benwick oversea.

There is of course no hint of the scene between Arthur and Guinevere in the convent, but in Book XXI., chap vii., we are told that after Arthur's death Guinevere retired to Almesbury, where "she was ruler and abbess as reason would."

As the figure of Lancelot in some respects tends to draw our eyes too much away from the proper hero of the poem, Arthur, the poet wisely omits what might have been a most effective Idyll in itself, namely, the interview (after Arthur's death) between Lancelot and Guinevere in the convent, and the death-scene of Lancelot. These incidents are the most touching and Homer-like pictures in the old Romance, and should be read, not only for their own merit, but as illustrating the clear sense of proportion and poetic unity that has guided Tennyson in the structure of his work.

It will have been noticed that the mood of nature is continually represented in the *Idylls* as coinciding with the moods and prospects of the human characters of the story; the everlasting elements, as Shelley says, feel with the worm, man (*Cenci*, iii. 2). Mr. Elsdale states that the action of the poem extends over a single

"mystic year." It seems, however, preferable to say that the poem has progressive notes of season, for the poet is thinking less of the year itself, and less of the four seasons that "fill the measure of the year," than of those "seasons in the mind of man" that Keats has pictured in his sonnet.

"He has his lusty spring," the time of the Gareths and Geraints; his summer, of heat and midsummer madness, the time of Balin, of Merlin, of Lancelot, of the Grail quest, and of Pelleas; his autumn, with its withered leaves, its fading glories of tournament and lofty aspiration, its death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom of Tristram's death and Guinevere's flight. And now it is the winter, when the Queen is in her frosty cell, and the death-white mist clings to the dead earth. Finally, the last day of the old year comes, when Arthur's wound takes cold beside the wintry sea. It is not a literal year that is signified here, but the year of spiritual allegory, the seasons of human life.

The Idyll begins with the usual prospective predication of the central fact of the story that is about to be told.

"Queen Guinevere had fled the court, and sat  
There in the holy house at Almesbury  
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,  
— A novice."

Then the poet gives a retrospect of the immediate causes that have led to her flight. Modred has made the

revelation of her sin the stepping-stone for his ambitious schemes, and strong hatred of Lancelot has intensified his malignity. We are given a picture of the intrigues and spyings that have been going on in the court, and of the slightly grotesque incident by which Lancelot incurs Modred's special hate.

Guinevere's heart troubles her; she feels that the one hope of continued safety lies in total separation from her lover. At last their farewells are being said, but they have deferred the parting once too often—the spies have trapped them and the end is come.

Lancelot urges her to go with him oversea, but she refuses (compare *Mal.* XX. iv.) Loyal to her least wish, even in this crisis he submits to her will, and departs alone to his own land, while she takes sanctuary among the nuns at Almesbury. She does not tell her name, but her "beauty, grace, and power" prevail upon the nuns, and they receive her. She abides there unknown, and so she is abiding at the time of the story stated in the opening lines.

But as

"The scandal of the Court,  
Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,  
And the strange sound of an adulterous race,"

formerly beat across the iron grating of the cell in which Percivale's sister had dwelt (*Graail*, 78), so the quiet convent of Almesbury is disturbed by rumours of Modred's usurpation,—for Arthur, thinking that the Queen has fled with Lancelot, has crossed the sea to

make war upon him, and Modrett in Arthur's absence has seized the kingdom.

Then we have the scene of the Queen and the little prattling maid—the innocent child judging unconsciously the sinful woman beside her—

“So she, like many another babbler, hurt  
Whom she would soothe, and harm'd where she would heal.”

Guinevere's reveries slip back to the old days when Lancelot brought her first to Arthur, whom she thought cold and passionless: not like her Lancelot. The woman's conscience has not yet overcome her love; she is growing “half-guilty” in her thoughts, when suddenly Arthur comes,—and she is a suppliant lying at his feet.

It would not be just to attempt to draw a parallel between the scene that follows and the scene in Milton's tragedy when Dalila appears before Samson. The objects of the two poets are quite different. In the tragedy we feel that Milton himself is Samson and Mary Powell is Dalila—it is a parable on the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce. But Tennyson is here impersonal and dramatic in the highest degree—Arthur's anger is not so much against the woman's weakness and folly as against the mischief she has wrought by it, for she has spoiled the purpose of his life.

The King's speech begins with a mercilessly true summary of the consequences of her conduct, and then he rises to describe his own high aims, and the love he

has felt for her. He comes not to urge her crimes, but to say before they part for ever that he forgives her. In his love and pity he holds out a hope to her that hereafter "in that world where all is pure" they may be reunited. Low he bends over her, and she knows that he has blessed her. He is gone, and she has not seen his face—has not answered his farewell.

The poet then portrays the emotions that overwhelm her. The revulsion of feeling has come, and her eyes are opened at last. But her boding words when first entering the convent—Too late, too late—send their dirge-like echoes through the verses still—

"Is there none  
Will tell the King I love him tho' so late?"

There is none; it is too late. The good nuns pity her and weep with her.

We touch the old legendary ground once in the mention of her ruling as Abbess, and then she passes

"To where beyond these voices there is peace."

The opening lines describe how Modred

"Like a subtle beast  
Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,  
Ready to spring, waiting a chance."

This, by a curious coincidence, is the very simile that Arthur Hallam used to describe Tennyson's fame waiting to come upon him!—



“A being full of clearest insight,  
 . . . whose fame  
 Is couching now with panther eyes intent,  
 As who shall say, ‘I’ll spring to him anon,  
 And have him for my own.’”<sup>1</sup>

Pope’s lines are too well known to need quotation in connection with the “silent smiles of slow disparagement,” in line 14.

It is a hard thing to understand how a person like Vivien (l. 28) could ever have been tolerated in a court such as Arthur’s was, at least in outward character; however, where Modred and Gawain were tolerable, she may have been tolerable also.

The “awful dream” of Guinevere, line 75, is an example of the use the poet makes of dreams to foreshadow the future; compare the dreams of Leodegran, Lynette, Elaine, and Tristram.

The Raven, line 132, the sacred bird of Odin, the Northern War-God, has always been deemed a bird of evil augury. “Its supposed faculty of ‘smelling death’ formerly rendered its presence, or even its voice, ominous to all” (Dyer, *Eng. Folklore*, p. 78).

“For housel or for shrift,” line 146,—for receiving the Eucharist or for confession.

The “too late” song echoes the words from lines 130 and 157. It is founded on the story of the foolish virgins, in St. Matthew xxv. Tennyson refers to the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Mr. Jennings’s *Lord Tennyson*, p. 62.

same parable in the *May Queen* : "Now though my lamp is lighted late, there's one will let me in."

The child's talk that follows is a recapitulation of the story of the Coming of Arthur, as it may be supposed to have settled itself in the popular imagination.

The "white mermaiden" and the "strong man-breasted things" have been sung by Tennyson in separate poems; and the "distant horn" of the little elves of chasm and cleft recalls the "horns of Elfland" in the echo-song in the *Princess*.

The fairy mythology of Tennyson is not very elaborate. "In his description of the genii and faerie spirits which in earlier and happier ages haunted Britain," says Mr. Collins, "he has drawn on Crofton Croker's *Fairy Legends*." The Grail mysteries supply the first part of the following description :—

" For every knight  
Had whatsoever meat he long'd for served  
By hands unseen ; and even as he said  
Down in the cellar merry bloated things  
Shouldered the spigot, straddling on the butts  
While the wine ran."

This latter portion is a close reproduction of MacClise's picture on the title-page of Croker's legend of the *Merlin* ; and in the text we are told that when Mr. MacCarthy "arrived at the door, which he found open, he thought he heard a noise, as if of rats or mice scrambling over the casks, and on advancing perceived a little figure, about six inches in height, seated astride

upon the pipe of the oldest port in the place, and bearing a spigot upon his shoulder" (p. 82, ed. 1836. This quotation was first pointed out by Mr. Collins).

Bude and Bos, line 288, are districts of Cornwall. In the *Romance of Launfal* "Kyng Ban-Booȝt and Kyng Bos" are introduced, but I cannot say whether their names have anything to do with the places here mentioned (Halliwell, *Fairy Mythol.* p. 3).

The first edition of this Idyll, 1859, reads "Dundagil" instead of "Tintagil," in line 291.

The old bard's remarkable prophecy (in lines 295-304) of the dependence for complete success of Arthur's aims upon his finding

"A woman in her womanhood as great  
As he was in his manhood,"

indicates Tennyson's profound sense of the supremacy of man and woman in union. Man cannot succeed alone : neither (as the Princess Ida found) can woman : but

"The twain together well might move the world."

The old bard, with prophetic second-sight, foresees the dolorous day to be - he falters and his hand falls from the harp.

Tennyson thus transforms into dramatic poetry Malory's bald account of Merlin's warning to Arthur before he marries Guinevere, that it was not wholesome for him to take her to wife. In the *Morte Darthur* Arthur, being thus prophetically warned of disaster, and

of her and Lancelot's love for each other, has only himself to blame for what he foreknows must follow; but in the *Idylls* there is no open forewarning, only this break in the song of the bard's vision, the real significance of which does not become manifest until after the event that he dared not openly foretell.

Both Lancelot and Arthur, the Queen says, forebore their own advantage in tilt and in battle. See Malory VII. xxviii. for an instance of Lancelot's forbearance; we shall have a greater instance hereafter, when he

"Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left  
He spared to lift his hand against the King  
Who made him knight."

Guinevere adds, what Tennyson so frequently impresses on us, that

"Manners are not idle, but the fruit  
Of loyal nature and of noble mind."

This indeed must remain the greatest praise of the old chivalric system: it softened manners. "The greater man the greater courtesy," we had before. *Dicta* on the value of manners are numerous in the Romance. For example, X. lxxxi.: "Then shall he never win worship, said Queen Guenever, for, and it happeth an envious man once to win worship, he shall be dishonoured twice therefore. And for this cause all men of worship hate an envious man, and will show him no favour. And he that is courteous, kind, and gentle, hath favour in every place." If the student who reads

the *Morte Darthur* through will take the trouble to note down such maxims of chivalric courtesy whenever he meets them, a very interesting collection of honourable precepts will be the result.

In line 345 the "doom of fire" means everlasting torment; in line 534 the "flaming death" means burning at the stake. See Malory, VIII. ii. xxxiv.; XVIII. iv. vi.; XIX. ix.; XX. iii.; Ellis, *Metr. Rom.* p. 168; for references to this mode of punishing unfaithful wives.

In line 387 the poet describes very picturesquely the appearance of an expanse of blue-bells in the woods—

"That seem'd the heavens upbreking thro' the earth."

In the valleys of the inner Himalayas a like beautiful appearance is visible in May, but is there caused by the forget-me-nots that cover the mountain-meadows till they seem

"A little sky  
Gulf'd in a world below."

We learn from Arthur's words in line 419 that Guinevere's father, Leodegran, is no more. Arthur calls him happy in that he is dead before he could know of his child's dishonour.

It is well, he adds, that she has no children.

This is the one unduly hard thing that Arthur says in his otherwise just words to her. Well it may be, now, in her dishonour, that she has no children; but

how different, with sons and daughters—the true “warmth of double life”—around her, her career might have been, it is not difficult to imagine. “He has no children,” says Macduff of Malcolm; we may say it here of Arthur. It makes him harder on her than he might otherwise have been.

The line is introduced no doubt to lend force to the antithesis that follows:—

“The children born of thee are sword and fire,  
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,  
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts  
Of heathen.”

The “craft of kindred” refers to Modred’s treachery, for this visit of Arthur’s takes place when he is on his way to that last battle in the West.

It is a question, perhaps, whether Arthur’s speech would not have been the better for the omission of lines 508-519, and had read—

“I am not made of so slight elements.  
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.  
Better the King’s waste hearth and aching heart  
Than thou reseated,” etc.

After all he has said of her sin previously, it is almost an anti-climax to divert our attention from his own particular case to the general case of the man

“Who either for his own or children’s sake”

lets the false wife abide within his house. He has just emphasised the fact of her being childless, and now he

speaks of the general case when there are children to be considered. It may be urged that it is Arthur's nature to be didactic. This is true, but his maxims are out of place here alone with Guinevere: there is no necessity for this further justification of his course of action.

Guinevere's own words to Lancelot,

"I am yours,  
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond"  
*(Elaine, l. 135),*

rise up in judgment against her here in Arthur's

"They are not mine,  
But Lancelot's: nay, they never were the King's"  
*(Guin. l. 547).*

The golden Dragon of the great Pendragonship on Arthur's helmet (line 593) is thus described by Spenser:—

"His haughtie helmet, horrid all with gold,  
Both glorious brightnesse and great terrour bred;  
For all the crest a dragon did enfold  
With greedie pawes, and over all did spredd  
His golden winges; his dreadfull hideous hedd,  
Close couched on the beyer, seemd to throw  
From flaming mouth bright sparkles fiery redd,  
That suddaine horror to faint hearts did show;  
And sealy tayle was stretcht adowne his backe full lowe."  
*P. Q., l. vii. 31.*

Perhaps the Staubbach was in the poet's thought when he described in line 603 the stream that "spouting from the cliff, falls in mid air," but remakes itself at the

base. The simile is rather too recondite and ornate for this moment of simple tragic passion.

In line 622 *defeat* seems used in its Shaksperian sense of ruin or destruction. The "warmth and colour," line 641, is that previously referred to in *Elaine*, line 134.

The pathetic gentleness of the cadence in the last line,

"To where beyond these voices there is peace,"

is as exquisite as that in Milton's finest verse —

"And I shall shortly be with them that rest."



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

BEFORE discussing either the significance or the sources of this Idyll, its literary history must briefly be recorded.

The poem of the *Morte Darthur*—a fragment comprised in lines 170 to 440 of the present *Passing of Arthur*—was originally published in the *Poems* of 1842, in a poetical setting entitled *The Epic*. It is still reprinted in this form among the collected poems; but in 1870, when *The Holy Grail and other Poems* appeared, an enlarged version, under the title of the *Passing of Arthur*, became the definitive Idyll, the last book of the Epic.

Facing the title-page of the *Grail* volume just-mentioned is a notification of the order in which the Idylls were to be read thenceforward. The list is as follows:—

“The Coming of Arthur. *The Round Table*. Geraint and Enid. Merlin and Vivien. Lancelot and Elaine. The Holy Grail. Pelleas and Ettarre. Guinevere.—The Passing of Arthur.\*—\*This last, the earliest written

of the poems, is here connected with the rest in accordance with an early project of the Author's."

The additional lines by which this connection is cemented are lines 1 to 169, and lines 441 to the end.

The Author's footnote, given above, is important, for it saves us from the necessity of speculating further as to whether Tennyson originally meant to compose a connected poem or not.

The *Last Tournament* was published in the *Contemporary Review* in 1871, and appeared in a volume with a new Idyll, *Gareth and Lynette*, in 1872.

The Idyll of *Enid*, or as it is called in the above notice, *Geraint and Enid*, was at the same time divided into two parts in the collective re-issue of the *Idylls*.

Lastly, *Balin and Balan* came in the *Tiresias* volume of 1885, and completed the Round Table.

Malory's twenty-first book needs to be compared closely with parts of this concluding Idyll. It is better to say absolutely that both his picture and Tennyson's are highly imaginative and poetic, than to institute a comparison between the two with a view of determining their respective merits. It must be acknowledged, however, that while Malory is telling the story of Lancelot as well as that of Arthur, Tennyson has the advantage of being able to concentrate our view upon the one pathetic figure of the wounded King.

This gives the closing Idyll a singleness, a tragic simplicity and heroic grandeur, that we miss to some

extent in the mingled "Morte Artus" and "Lancelot" story of the old knight.

When we turn to the *Passing of Arthur*, and examine the portions that have been added to the old Homeric fragment of the *Morte Darthur*, we see that the additional lines not only link the dramatic scene of Arthur's death to that of his parting with Guinevere, but also continue the allegorical underplot and bring it to a concordant close.

In the original four Idylls of 1859—*Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*—there are no incidents plainly meant to be interpreted in a spiritual sense; although we now see that such an application is possible. But in the volume of 1870 the new Idylls—the *Coming*, *Gareth*, *Pelleas*, the *Grail*, and the enlarged *Morte* or *Passing of Arthur*—all clearly shadow forth a more or less distinguishable allegory.

To a mind like Tennyson's, at once philosophical and dramatic, the possibility of giving the story a mystical, esoteric meaning must from the beginning have presented itself; and in the interval of ten years between the earlier group of Idylls and the later, the poet probably came to perceive more fully than at first that the collocation of a series of mere cameos of knightly loves and fights, however exquisitely chiselled, would not be in itself sufficient to impart artistic unity to a long work; that to rise to the height of his great argument he must assert the spiritual truth, must justify eternal Providence in some loftier way.

Hence he seems to have determined to elaborate his "old project" of imparting an inner meaning to the legendary narrative; and accordingly in the Idylls of 1870 Arthur's story is represented as a sort of mystical Pilgrim's Progress; a struggle of the Christian Spirit hindered by the Flesh, and by the environment of a naughty world.

It is strange how historical narratives sometimes lend themselves to a duplicate application, either of a literal or of an allegorical kind. Dryden's great poem is the most perfect example of such extraordinary duality in literal history. But when the narrator is not tied to the concurrence of actual historical facts, when he is able to pick and choose, and to take liberties with his incidents and characters, the creation of an inner significance, as we see in Spenser and in Tennyson, is a comparatively easier task than Dryden's was.

In his earlier writings Tennyson several times manifested the allegorising and moralising bent of his mind. The *Palace of Art* is an instance of this tendency, for it represents a soul "possessed of many gifts, that did love beauty only," and traces that soul's progress through selfish hedonism to satiety and despair. The *Vision of Sin*, *Simeon Stylites*, and the *Two Voices* also represent spiritual conflicts and aspirations. In the Epilogue to the *Morte Darthur* fragment of 1842 the poet shadows forth a visionary interpretation of the career of Arthur, as representing the upward course and striving of the human race in general; he foreshadows the gradual

spread of the spirit of truth and enlightenment. And we are told, and may perceive, that in the *Idylls of the King* the poet means to represent symbolically the conflict of Sense and Soul. Let us briefly trace this allegory.

The *Coming of Arthur* shows us the soul, typified by Arthur, borne into this world of sense from the immortal sea that brought it hither. Heaven lies about it in the beginning; there is a dawn of joy and hope, a springtime of youth and love. The spirit that fills Arthur also fills all his knights for a time, for in childhood all hearts are pure and all hopes are high and noble.

The minor paraphernalia of the allegory—the great Hall of Arthur, symbolical, not of the body, like Spenser's House of Alma, but of the stages, the four great zones, through which the soul must rise, and the war that it must wage; the Church of Camelot, with the guiding powers, Merlin, Intellect, the Lady of the Lake, Religion, and the three helpful Queens, Christian virtues; the Sword of the Spirit, the armour of the soul militant; the dragon-boughts of evil temptations that twist and twine around us; the rays of heavenly radiance, Love and Faith and Hope, and the great symbol of the Cross,—these have no need of detailed interpretation: we may ascribe as much or as little meaning to them as we please. Then in the first Idyll of the Round Table we have the strife of Gareth, the strong youth, against the foolish symbols of Time that the "four fools"

have sucked from the holy hermit's rock-sculptured parable of

"The war of Time against the Soul of Man."

The fresh morning, the hot noon, the mellowing evening of Life are typified; the respective periods of youthful love, and golden cares and ambitions, and the fading life of settled habits good or bad. Even death itself is deprived of its terrors by the man who endureth firm unto the end.

Then in the Grail we see once more the higher life symbolised: and few there be that find it. There is an awful discipline needful—

"Men must rise on stepping-stones  
Of their dead selves";

must cross the broken arches over the chaotic sea of life, that only Galahad and Percivale traversed in safety. But such quests are only for the few; little men must be content to sit by little fires; even Arthur himself, the ordinary noble soul, cannot undertake the Grail at all times—he has a lowlier human task to first fulfil,

"As a hind  
To whom a space of land is given to plough."

The Soul that Arthur typifies is the soul of every one of us—it must feel the warmth of double life, must be mated to Sense, as Arthur is to Guinevere. If that union is happy and regulated, all will go well; the

purpose of the Soul's life will be fulfilled. But if not, if Sense, the co-mate of Soul, be weak and foolish, the children born of their union will be "red ruin and the breaking up of laws."

Last, as the sun of human existence is sinking in the west, that battle in the winter of life must come, must end in defeat—the soul must pass away. But not to perish utterly—there is a hope for men. Perchance in another life, a mansion incorruptible, it may heal it of its grievous wound. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

It may be objected that this allegory only crops out in a few places; that the stratum of romance frequently covers it and hides it. This is so; it does hide it; but the solid rock of spiritual truth is beneath the flowery meads of fancy all the same. Nor does the poet aim at composing an allegory out and out; he has only "multiplied visions, and used similitudes," to dimly shadow forth man's spiritual warfare here on earth.<sup>1</sup>

Looking at the lesson of this allegory as shown in the career of Arthur, are we to conclude that the poem is the story of a failure? Is sense too strong for soul in this world of ours? To the worldling like Tristram it seems to be so. Can Arthur make *me* pure, he asks—

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Elsdale, *Studies in the Idylls*, goes far more deeply into the allegory than I have done in the foregoing brief sketch, but my outline will give some general idea of what sort of allegory is to be found by the seeker.

“Can Arthur make me pure  
As any maiden child? lock up my tongue  
From uttering freely what I freely hear?  
Bind me to one? The wide world laughs at it.”

And the world and the Tristrams of the world will laugh at it as they have laughed at the Christ, the spiritual reformer, in every country and in every age.

But Tennyson gives a different answer to the question. The answer from the *Idylls* is the same as from the *Vision of Sin*—

“Is there any hope?  
To which an answer peal’d from that high land,  
But in a tongue no man could understand;  
And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn,  
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.”

There is hope—our little systems may perish, yet the seed remains. But ascetic schemes for controlling humanity must fail, whether they be schemes of men like Arthur or of women like Princess Ida. And the moral of such failures is virtually this, that the passions, no less than the intellectual powers and the spiritual yearnings of mankind, must be taken into account in ideal schemes for the regeneration of the world. Nevertheless all such failures of idealism are landmarks of social progress; our

“Wildest dreams  
Are but the needful preludes of the truth.”

Without meaning to depreciate the value of a moral significance in works of art, it may nevertheless be a



question whether we should attach any very great importance to the emblematic signification of this noble poem. If art is to teach practical morality and not mere hypocritical cant, it must do so by unconscious example instead of by pretentious precept; it must purify the heart by pathetic impression, rather than by didactic interpretation.

The time when allegory and parable could fruitfully teach mankind has long gone past, and the moral lessons of the *Idylls* must come from their noble song of heroic aspiration and tragic failure, from their representation of the Nemesis that overtakes the sinner, and not from their shadowing Sense at war with Soul, and still less from their cities built to music, and men in hardened skins, and blooming boys under the mask of death. The most that can be said of these features is that they give colour and peculiarity to the narrative—and these too are very good things in their smaller way.

With regard to the precise form of spiritual mysticism expounded by Tennyson, it does not seem to differ much from that of the ancient gnostics generally. Some of the doctrines of the Sufi poets of Persia seem to curiously resemble it. Thus in the following quotations from the *Salâmân* and *Abdul* of Jami, Edward Fitzgerald's version, we have the same doctrines condensed that are unfolded by Tennyson in the *Holy Grail*. Compare Galahad's aspirations with those of Jami in this opening invocation :—

“I would be  
 Thy lover, and thine only—I, mine eyes  
 Seal'd in the Light of Thee to all but Thee,  
 Yea in the revelation of Thyself  
 Lost to Myself, and all that Self is not  
 Within the Double World that is but One.”

With the Tennysonian Sense compare Absál :—

“And who was Absál? The Sense-adoring Body,  
 Slave to the Blood and Sense—through whom the Soul,  
 Although the Body's very Life it be,  
 Doth yet imbibe the knowledge and delight  
 Of things of Sense.”

And Salámán—a name compounded of *Salámat* and  
*Asmán*, Safety and Heaven :—

“A special Essence called the Soul of Man ;  
 A child of Heaven, in raiment unbeshamed  
 Of sensual taint, and so Salámán named.”

Lastly, Zuhrah is interpreted, as the second coming  
 of Arthur may be too :—

“For what is Zuhrah? What but that Divine  
 Original, of which the Soul of Man  
 Darkly possesst, by that fierce Discipline  
 At last he disengages from the dust,  
 And flinging off the baser rags of Sense,  
 And all in Intellectual light arrayed,  
 As conqueror and king he mounts the throne,  
 And wears the crown of Human Glory.”

Verily it is a hard matter for a poet to find anything  
 new to say under the sun.

There are many versions of the story of King Arthur's death. Tennyson follows Malory, distantly in the opening lines, and more closely in the old "Homeric echoes" of the final scene.

As Percivale tells in after years the story of the Grail, so here Sir Bedivere, in the white winter of his age, relates the death of Arthur. Or, to use Malory's words once more: "For this tale, Sir Bedivere, Knight of the Round Table, made it to be written" (XXI. vi.)

From the time when Arthur saw one lying in the dust at Aln  sbury, says Bedivere, he is dazed and forlorn. Life has no longer any clearness for him as in the old days. Bedivere pacing by night among the sleeping soldiers hears his moanings of despair. He has seen God, cries Arthur to himself, in the starry firmament, and in the beauteous earth, but in His ways with men he has not found Him. Has some lesser God made the world imperfectly, and will the High God come some time and reshape it according to His will? Or is it that the world is fair, but man such a purblind creature that he cannot see the final goal of ill? Arthur has hoped to work God's will upon earth, but he has striven vainly; all those whom he has trusted have proved false to him, and the realm that he has raised is lapsing into barbarism again. Has God forsaken him, he means; nay, there is a hope beyond.

These words depict the despair of the Idealist, to whom the economy of Heaven is dark; Nature seems perfect, why should man only mourn?

In Malory's third chapter of Book XXI. Arthur's dream is described, and the ghost of Gawain appears to him; but the two accounts are so dissimilar as not to call for collocation. Arthur tells his dream, and Bedivere comforts his master and calls his mind back from visionary thoughts of Gawain—trivial in death as in life—to the actuality of things, and the yet remaining hope of victory.

But this civil war, answers Arthur, is ruinous whether we win or lose—the king who fights his people fights himself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These words of Arthur's may be compared with Hughes's play, Dodsley, iv. 303 :—

"*Howell*. If fortune fawn.

*Arthur*. Each way on me she frowns. For win I, lose I, both procure my grief.

*Cador*. Put case you win, what grief?

*Arthur*. Admit I do, what joy?

*Cador*. Then may you rule.

*Arthur*. When I may die.

*Cador*. To rule is much.

*Arthur*. Small, if we covet nought.

*Cador*. Who covets not a crown.

*Arthur*. He that discerns the sword aloft.

*Cador*. That hangeth fast.

*Arthur*. But by a hair.

*Cador*. Right holds it up.

*Arthur*. Wrong pulls it down.

*Cador*. The commons help the king.

*Arthur*. They sometimes hurt.

*Cador*. At least the peers.

*Arthur*. Seld, if allegiance want.

*Cador*. Yet sovereignty.

*Arthur*. Not if subjection fail."

With the last speech compare "Authority forgets a dying King."

So Arthur moves west into Jyonesse, and the last battle is fought—at Camlan, beside the river Cambula, says Geoffrey (p. 270). It is a chaotic conflict, where friend smites friend amid the shroud of death-white fog. As evening comes on, the north wind blows the mist aside, and Arthur gazes on the scene of slaughter. Then comes the fatal duel, in which Modred wounds Arthur to the death and is himself slain by the last stroke of Excalibur.

From line 170 we come to the old *Morte Darthur* of 1842—"first made and latest left" of all the Idylls. Some bits of Malory may be quoted, for the last time.

From the line "So all day long," etc., we should compare Malory, XXI. iv., "And then they fought all the long day," etc., when the slaying of Modred is told. We must take the "broken chancel with a broken cross," line 177, as a symbol of Arthur's shattered crusade, but the lines are seemingly also a combination of two passages in the *Morte Darthur*. In XXI. iv. Lucan and Bedivere lead Arthur "betwixt them both to a little chapel not far from the seaside"; and in XIII. xvii. there is a scene described in which we have "a stony cross, which departed two ways in waste land," and "an old chapel," and the chapel door is "waste and broken." But there is no more necessity for tracing Tennyson's scenery here to these passages than there is for tracking the constituents of his fine line, "Lay a great water, and the moon was full," to Malory's "a

great water," IV. vi; "a broad water," VII. xix.; and "the moon shone clear," XIV. v.!

With line 183—

"The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
Whereof this world holds record"—

compare III. xiv. and XX. ix.: "Now have I lost the fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever held Christian king together. Alas, my good knights be slain away from me."

The casting away of Excalibur must be quoted in full :—

"But my time bieth fast, said the king. Therefore said Arthur, take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when thou comest there, I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come again, and tell me what thou there seest. My lord, said Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again. So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and haft were all of precious stones, and then he said to himself, If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss. And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And as soon as he might he came again unto the king, and said he had been at the water, and had thrown the sword into the water. What sawest thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but waves and winds. That is untruly said of thee, said the king; therefore go thou lightly again, and do my command as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword; and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again, and

told to the king that he had been at the water, and done his commandment. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan. Ah traitor, untrue, said king Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have wend that thou that hast been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead. Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side, and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might, and there came an arm and an hand above the water, and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw. Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long. Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank hove a little barge, with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw king Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the king: and so he did softly. And there received him three queens with great mourning, and so they set him down, and in one of their laps king Arthur laid his head, and then that queen said, Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught over much cold. And so then they rowed from the land; and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him. Then Sir Bedivere cried, Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me now ye go from me, and leave me here alone among mine enemies. Comfort thyself,

said the king, and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in: For I will into the vale of Avilion, to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul. But ever the queens and the ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest, and so he went all that night, and in the morning he was ware betwixt two holts hoar of a chapel and an hermitage" (XXI. v.)

This brings us down to line 440, the end of the old fragment. The concluding twenty-nine lines resume the mystical story. The passing Soul, having fought a good fight, having finished its course, having kept the faith, is received "beyond the limit of the world," with a faint and distant sound of acclaim,

"As if some fair city were one voice  
Around a king returning from his wars."

The seasons of man's life have run their course; it is the last night of the old year as Arthur passes away, and the sun rises bringing in the new year.

Yes, there is hope, after the strife and the darkness—

"God made himself an awful rose of dawn."

A few things remain to be noted.

The story of Arthur's death will be found in ballad form in Percy's *Reliques*, ii. 124, and in Bell's *Early Ballads*, p. 108.

Gawain is "blown along a wandering wind," as



Virgil describes the spirits exposed to the viewless winds; his moan, "Hollow, hollow all delight," is the confession of the worldling, wise too late, that all worldly joys are vanity.

The comparison (line 38) of the spectral cries growing fainter onward,

"Like wild birds that change  
Their season in the night,"

recalls *In Memoriam*, cxv.—

"The happy birds, that change their sky  
To build and brood; that live their lives  
From land to land."

But closer are the lines of Dante, *Inferno*, v. (Cary):—

"As cranes  
Chanting their dolorous notes, traverse the sky,  
Stretch'd out in long array; so I beheld  
Spirits, who came loud wailing, hurried on  
By their dire doom."

In line 43 the dim cries,

"As of some lonely city sack'd by night,"

may be compared with the *Princess*, iv. 147—

"There rose a shriek as of a city sack'd."

The recreant knights mentioned in line 61, who have repudiated their vows and their allegiance, nevertheless in their hearts know right well, says Bedivere, that

Arthur is the king. So in Bacon's essay "Of Atheism": "The Scripture saith, *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God*; it is not said, *The fool hath thought in his heart*, so as he rather saith it by rote to himself, as that he would have, than that he can thoroughly believe it, or be persuaded by it. For none deny there is a God, but those for whom it maketh that there were no God." Something like this seems to be signified by Bedivere's words.

\* The land of Lyonesse, line 83, has been mentioned in chapter iii. It is supposed to have been a region west of Cornwall, of which the Scilly Isles are the only parts remaining above water. There seems to be a certain likeness between *Lyonesse* and *Linnius*, a province (Lennox) mentioned by Geoffrey; but such matters must be left to the professed students of Arthurian localities. Sir E. Strachey says that St. Pol de Leon in Brittany is meant.

"This way and that dividing the swift mind" is a Virgilian turn of expression.

With the epithet "unknightly," line 288, compare Spenser, *R. Q.*, VI. iii. 35: "unknightly knight, the blemish of that name."

Arthur in his anger says to Bedivere, line 300,

"I will arise and slay thee with mine hands"—

an archaic mode of speaking that is found in Malory, X. xxii., "I shall slay thee with mine own hands"; compare X. lxxx.

The "streamer of the northern morn" is the aurora borealis, seen when the "moving isles of winter," floating icebergs, crash together in the northern seas.

"My wound hath taken cold"

is from Malory, XXI. v.; compare VIII. viii.

"A cry that *shivered* to the tingling stars," line 367, thrilled, vibrated; as in the *Princess*, iii.: "consonant chords that shiver to one note."

The use of *dash* as in line 383, "dashed with drops of onset," is repeated by Tennyson in the *Princess*, v. 157: "dashed with death."

Arthur's golden curls, "that made his forehead like a rising sun," have been remarked on in the *Coming of Arthur*: compare also Maud's "little head *sunning* over with curls."

The holy Elders, line 401, are the Magi mentioned in the *Crail*, line 452. As to the Round Table, see chap. iii.

In line 408, "the old order changeth, giving place to new," the words that were full of hope in the *Coming of Arthur*, line 508, have now become words of resignation to the will of God.

"Lest one good custom should corrupt the world," line 410, for "goodness, growing to a plurisy, dies in his own too much," *Hamlet*, IV. vii. 118.

To Mr. Collins's note on the "gold chains" that bind the earth about the feet of God, add Chaucer's reference to the "sayre cheyne of love"—

"For with that fayre cheyne of love he bond  
The fyr, the watir, the eyr, and eek the lond,  
In certeyn boundes, that they may not flee."

*Knyghtes Tale*, 2133.

With line 435—the swan

"Fluting a wild carol ere her death"—

compare Tennyson's *Dying Swan*.

"Pliny," says Mr. Dyer, "alludes to a superstition by which swans are said to sing sweetly before their death, but falsely, he tells us, as proved through his own observation. Sir Thomas Browne, in his *Vulgar Errors* . . . says: 'From great antiquity, and before the melody of Syrens, the musical note of swans hath been commended, and they sing most sweetly before their death; for thus we read in Plato, that from the opinion of *metempsychosis*, or transmigration of the souls of men into the bodies of beasts most suitable unto their human condition, after his death Orpheus the musician became a swan; thus was it the bird of Apollo, the god of music, by the Greeks; and an hieroglyphick of music among the Egyptians, from whom the Greeks derived their conception,' etc. (*Eng. Folklore*, p. 97).

With the weird rhyme in line 445, "From the great deep to the great deep he goes," compare the *Coming of Arthur*, line 409; and with the "three whereat we gazed," line 454, compare the *Coming of Arthur*, line 275. The stateliest of the three queens is in the legend Morgan le Fay, Arthur's sister. For the thought

implied in the last line see *In Memoriam*, cvi.: "Ring out, wild bells."

One last bit of advice has to be given to the student who has accompanied me through this little book. Critical study of an author is very well in its way, and useful as a preparation for the appreciation of a poem. But it is only truly useful in the sense that a study of the sciences helps our appreciation of the works of the Creator. Such learning is a means and not the end. We must look at nature with direct eyes, and not through the medium of books, if we would commune with the spirit of nature; and we must read poetry, not for the sake of the particles of literary dust that adhere to it, but for its own sake, and for the poet's sake, sincerely and sympathetically. Only by doing so can we really bring our own small hearts into contact with the large heart of the poet. Only thus can a great poem like the *Idylls of the King* become to us "the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."

THE END

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